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# RHETORICS OF ENGAGEMENT ACROSS AND ABOUT FAITH AND WORLDVIEW DIFFERENCE

John MacLean

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Interactions across faith and worldview difference are becoming increasingly common in many communities and around the world. These interactions can be verbally or physically violent, and even deadly, or they can be beautiful and enriching, or they can be ignored, resisted or refused. In this dissertation I put scholarship that endorses a broader conception of rhetoric in conversation with my personal experience in interfaith relations and dialogue in order to discover better ways to study these interactions. I propose and develop two constructs, “rhetorical space” and “rhetorical stance”, that I use to explore and analyze people’s attitudes toward and experiences of these interactions across faith and worldview difference. The data analyzed includes my own autoethnographic and participant observation data, published materials that describe or constitute interaction across faith and worldview difference, and student data from classroom research in three undergraduate courses I taught at a non-sectarian mid-western university. In addition to offering a more complete and robust understanding of these interactions across faith and worldview difference, I suggest ways to facilitate engagement that is (more) peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous.

RHETORICS OF ENGAGEMENT ACROSS AND ABOUT  
FAITH AND WORLDVIEW DIFFERENCE

JOHN MACLEAN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2015

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RHETORICS OF ENGAGEMENT ACROSS AND ABOUT  
FAITH AND WORLDVIEW DIFFERENCE

JOHN MACLEAN

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Bob Broad, Chair

Gerald Savage

Susan Burt

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J.M.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTERACTIONS ACROSS FAITH AND WORLDVIEW DIFFERENCE:

#### DEADLY, BEAUTIFUL, RESISTED, OR IGNORED?

On 7 January 2015, brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi stormed into the offices of the French weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris and killed eleven people, including five cartoonists, and injured eleven others. While leaving they were heard saying “We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad.” and “God is Great” (“Charlie Hebdo,” 2015)

Previously on several occasions, *Charlie Hebdo* had published issues with cartoons portraying the prophet Mohammed in ways that were very offensive to Muslims. Many Muslims believe that any portrayal of the prophet Mohammed is forbidden.

In the evening of 7 January 2015, the first of several demonstrations, vigils, and marches took place. These were attended by millions in France and elsewhere in support of *Charlie Hebdo* and free speech and press. Many held signs which read “Je suis Charlie” (I am Charlie).

Two days later Saïd and Chérif Kouachi were killed when they exited the building where they had been holding hostages and started shooting at police. It was reported that they had said they wanted to die as martyrs. (“Cornered French suspects vow to die as martyrs,” 2015)

On 9 January 2015, Amedy Coulibaly in apparent coordination with Saïd and Chérif Kouachi took hostages in a kosher food market and killed four Jewish hostages.

On 13 January 2015, BBC Journalist, Patrick Jackson visited Sarcelles, near Paris, and spoke with several French Muslims. While condemning the killing and violence, they could not identify with Charlie Hebdo. One said, “They were warned but they kept on mocking the prophet, but you cannot kill for that. You cannot go against press freedom in France. Still, they will have to answer to God.” (Jackson, 2015)

The other staff at *Charlie Hebdo* published the magazine the following week (with a much bigger print run) with a cover showing the prophet Mohammed with a tear holding a “Je suis Charlie” sign and a caption stating, “All is forgiven”.

PEN, an organization that campaigns for freedom of speech, awarded the “Freedom of Expression Courage Award” to *Charlie Hebdo*. But some journalists objected, including Garry Trudeau, the creator of the Doonesbury cartoon strip, who stated, “Traditionally, satire has comforted the afflicted while afflicting the comfortable. Satire punches up, against authority of all kinds, the little guy against the powerful. By punching downward, by attacking a powerless, disenfranchised minority with crude, vulgar drawings closer to graffiti than cartoons, Charlie wandered into the realm of hate speech” (Wyatt, 2015).

This recent series of events demonstrates some of the tragic and deadly potential of interactions across religious and worldview<sup>1</sup> difference. On a global scale, both today and throughout history, tensions, fighting, and even violent, deadly conflicts related to religion can seem ubiquitous. Eight years before 9-11, Samuel Huntington (1993) included differences of religion as a, if not the, major factor in his “clash of civilizations” theory. While some objected (e.g. Maalouf, 1998; Said, 2001; Sen, 2001), many saw 9-11 (and see events since) as a confirmation of Huntington’s theory. Martin Marty outlined ten reasons to study and teach religion. The first reason was that “Religion motivates most killing in the world today” (1996, p. 14).

However, the Charlie Hebdo events also show both the complexity of these interactions and perhaps some reason for a more positive outlook. The vast majority of people, including Muslims who were very offended by the portrayals of their prophet, were clearly against the violence, and felt sympathy with the families and friends of those killed and injured. Some strongly defended the rights of “free speech,” including the right to be highly offensive. Others, who also strongly support this core value of western culture, wondered about the limits of free speech. French Muslims felt conflicted about their identities as French and as Muslim, and about their interactions with non-Muslims.

Other events and ongoing work demonstrate that interactions across faith or worldview difference can also be peaceful, respectful, and even beautiful, illustrating Martin Marty’s second reason to study and teach religion, “Religion contributes to most healing in the world today” (1996, p. 15). In January 2011 in Egypt, after a Coptic church was bombed on New Years Day, thousands of Muslims gathered and stood as

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<sup>1</sup> I will explain in more depth what I mean by “worldview” below. Here, with regard to the Charlie Hebdo events, I am mainly thinking of the generally secular, non-religious outlook embodied in the French concept of *laïcité*.



“human shields” outside churches on Coptic Christmas (7 January) so Christians could pray in peace and without fear of violence against them (Cole, 2011; El-Rashidi, 2011; Jilani, 2011; Kennedy, 2011). Douglas Johnston, author of *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (2008), openly identifies as a Christian and founded the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD). He has worked effectively with Muslim madrassa leaders in Pakistan to broaden their curriculums and include education about human rights (Johnston, 2007). Eboo Patel, a Muslim, founded Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC). IFYC trained students of various faiths have worked to set up interfaith student organizations at universities and colleges across America where students of different faiths come together for community service projects and then discussion of how their faith motivates their service (Patel & Brodeur, 2006). In 2007, an unprecedentedly diverse group of Muslim scholars and leaders signed the “A Common Word” document which invites Christians to interfaith discussion. These leaders recognize that together Muslims and Christians make up over half the world’s population, and without peace and justice between them, world peace would not be attainable (“The Official Website of A Common Word,” 2009). There has been widespread positive response to this invitation from Christians, and global interfaith conferences have been convened for Muslim and Christian leaders.

### **The Goals and Exigency of this Study**

Interactions across and about faith and worldview difference have been and (still) need to be studied from many perspectives. *In this dissertation I explore interactions across and about faith and worldview difference from the perspective of rhetoric studies to discover ways this discipline can help us understand these interactions and find ways to facilitate interactions that are peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous. To do this,*

I put selected rhetoric scholarship in conversation with three sets of data: autoethnographic and participant observation data from my own interactions across and about faith and worldview difference; published materials that describe or constitute interaction across faith and worldview difference; data from classroom research that explored students' attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference.

Slightly adapting Marty, I would like to offer, as the exigency for this dissertation, these three reasons to study interactions across faith and worldview difference:

1. Interactions across faith and worldview difference can be violent and deadly.
2. Interactions across faith and worldview difference can be beautiful and enriching.
3. Interactions across faith and worldview difference can be ignored, resisted, or refused.

That these extreme potentials exist is intriguing, troubling, and indicative of the complexity of these interactions. Figuring out what contributes to interactions moving toward violence and (ab)use of power or toward peaceful exchange – or why people ignore or resist these interactions seems to be very important.

### **Research Questions**

I believe that, as a scholar (and as a person), I have an ethical obligation not only to use my study to better understand the world around us, but also to offer contributions to human society, as well as to my discipline. Thus, in this study, I will explore these questions:

1. How can the field of rhetoric help us explore, analyze, and better understand interactions across or about faith or worldview difference, including all types of interactions, as well as resistance or refusal to interact?
2. How can this exploration, analysis, and better understanding facilitate engagement across or about faith or worldview difference that is peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous?
3. How, then, can this exploration, analysis, understanding, and facilitation inform the field of rhetoric?

The switch from “interaction” to “engagement” between question one and two is intentional. I will use “engagement” to signify back and forth communication between persons or groups that is intentional and often planned by at least one of the interlocutors. I will use “interaction” to signify back and forth communication more generally, including communication that “just happens.” “Interaction” is broader and includes the idea of “engagement.” I want to better understand any and all interfaith or inter-worldview *interaction*, but I want to offer guidance that can help people intentionally *engage* in more peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous ways.

These questions and these verbs also highlight my understanding of rhetoric. I, along with many other rhetoric scholars, have adopted an understanding of rhetoric that is broader than the classical definition which focuses on persuasion. I see the study of rhetoric as the exploration of individuals and groups interacting across or about difference. I will discuss this understanding of rhetoric further in chapter two.

### **Worldview**

I want to explain briefly my usage of the word “worldview” in the above questions. The word “worldview,” from the German “Weltanschauung” has been and is

currently used popularly and scholarly in various ways. Weltanschauung was first used by Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Judgment* and spread rapidly to other languages. It has been discussed (and criticized and given different meanings) by various philosophers, natural scientists, and social scientists (Naugle, 1998).

I appreciate anthropologist Paul Hiebert's discussion of the cultural and social functions of worldview. He suggests that worldviews are plausibility structures, the assumptions on which beliefs and explanations are built. Worldviews give emotional security, especially at times of crisis. They also validate deep cultural norms, shaping our perception of what ought to be. Worldviews help to integrate culture – pulling all the previous functions together into one view, and they monitor cultural change – guiding the selection, rejection, or reinterpretation of new ideas or products based on fit with the culture – thus providing stability. Finally, Hiebert claims that worldviews provide psychological reassurance that the world is as it is seen, providing a sense of peace. People experience a worldview crisis when their experience does not match their worldview. (2008, pp. 29–30) These functions, which I would argue can be similar to the functions of a sincerely and seriously held faith, point to the potential for discomfort, misunderstanding, and conflict when people holding different worldviews or faiths discuss aspects of these worldviews or faiths. This points to my usage of “worldview” not to argue one or another view or critique of the concept, and not primarily to analyze persons or groups, but to help understand and conceptualize what it is that is in tension (or different) during interactions across difference.

When I use “worldview”, I am using it to denote a dynamic, complex, emergent, integrated system of thought, affect, and judgment (ideas or beliefs, feelings, and values)

that is developed culturally and is held by individuals and shared by groups (with various degrees of consciousness); that makes, for them, (at least provisional) “sense” of their experience of “life, the universe, and everything”; that informs their “life-choices”; and that can be (usually slowly) informed and changed by their experiences, associations, and interactions. Generally, in my usage, a “worldview” is related to and overlaps with, yet is not identical to a “philosophy of life”, or a “culture”, or a “belief system”, or a “religion” or “faith”. However, I will also often use “worldview” in conjunction with “religion” or “faith”, most often in a phrase like “across religious, faith or worldview difference”. In this case, while still referencing the above meaning, I am specifically using “worldview” to emphasize my intended inclusion of explicitly non-religious systems, e.g. atheism and agnosticism.

### **Personal Connections**

The process of researching and writing this dissertation has been very personal for me – very connected to my life experiences and who I am as a person. I feel that it is important to explicitly write about this for a few reasons. First, intellectual honesty compels me to disclose this. These connections and the biases they represent do not prevent me from doing good research (in fact, I believe they enhance my doing of good research). However, I want to be transparent and invite the critique of others who have perspectives of my research that I don’t. Second, the topic of my research is integral to my personal life. Thus, I feel understanding these connections will enable the reader to better understand my research. Third, aspects of these connections inform my research or are autoethnographic or participant observation data for my research.

My research is connected to my life and faith journey. In my research I explore various very different attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith

difference. Throughout my life I have personally held or observed many of these attitudes and had or observed many of these experiences. I think it is worthwhile to relate at some length my “interfaith autobiography” as it will show how various experiences and aspects of my life have informed and shaped my current attitudes, beliefs, values, passions, and goals; which inform and shape my current approach or rhetorical stance as I engage in both intra-faith and interfaith or inter-worldview contexts; which, in turn, informs and shapes my research.

### **My Interfaith Autobiography**

I grew up in a conservative evangelical Christian environment which was staunchly pro-Israel and Christian Zionist. Like many conservative, fundamentalist churches in the 1960’s and 1970’s, my family’s church had biblical prophecy conferences where the “miraculous” military victories of Israel were seen as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and as evidence of the “imminent return of Christ.” The Jewish people were “God’s Chosen People,” thus, clearly, the good guys, the Arabs (at that point synonymous with Muslims for me) who fought against Israel were obviously the bad guys – it was that simple. While we did not know “the day or the hour,” we did *know* that Jesus is coming back – first to “rapture” his Church (all “true believers”), and then again, after the seven-year “Tribulation” (which will be just a taste of God’s judgment) to save Israel by violently dispatching the evil hordes who (as is prophesied) will be gathered at “Armageddon” to attack Israel. Jesus would usher in the “Millennium,” after which God would finally and justly judge his enemies by casting them into the “Lake of Fire” where they would suffer eternal conscious torment. It might look bad for Christians now, but God was going to win in the end. I accepted, even embraced this to the point that, while in junior high school, I took an evening class at a local Bible College on

Dispensationalism (the main theology behind the pre-millennialism briefly described above) taught by one of the leading dispensational theologians. About the same time, I entered and won a “teen preaching” contest with a sermon on the reliability of (pre-millennial interpretations of) biblical prophecy of Jesus’ Second Coming based on the demonstrated reliability of prophecies of Jesus’ first coming.

Of course, we knew “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) We, too, loved the world and the most important way to love others was to evangelize them – because we knew we had the Truth and they didn’t – and we didn’t want them to burn in Hell forever. I felt a little bad that I did not evangelize more, but I went to a conservative Christian K-12 school, and kept busy with church activities, so I didn’t mix much with people who were not Christians. But I did like to read “apologetics” books which were full of evidence that proved we were right, so at least I was ready to evangelize. With regard to interactions with other Christians, we practiced “second-degree separation” – we would not support the Billy Graham evangelistic crusade taking place nearby because, while Billy Graham might have been “doctrinally pure,” he associated with other “liberal” Christians who were not doctrinally pure (that is, he did not practice “first-degree separation”).

Later in high school, and more so while attending a conservative Bible college, I asked doctrinal questions for which I did not have good answers – and discussed them with a good friend at the college who did the same. Our biggest questions had to do with those who were not Christians. Bob’s<sup>2</sup> biggest question had to do with God condemning non-Christians to a hell of *eternal* conscious torment when they had committed a finite

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<sup>2</sup> All names of friends and students have been changed.

number of sins in a finite lifetime. It just did not seem right or fair. Arguments that sin against an infinite God deserved infinite punishment were not persuasive for us. One of my biggest questions was about those non-Christians who died without ever having a chance to hear about Jesus. Did they go to hell because they didn't accept what they never had a chance to hear about? "Answers" that evaded these questions by emphasizing that "the *real* question" is "is it fair for God to forgive you for your sins and let you into heaven" or that "no one deserves heaven" infuriated us. In that time and place, my question was a bit "safer" and I was able to write a paper on the topic that ended with a question and did not provide an answer. We were not exposed to any non-conservative, non-evangelical theologians in any substantial or equitable way, but, rather, were "protected" from them. When it was time to graduate, I do remember being hesitant about signing the "required" doctrinal statement. I was not sure I agreed with all of it, but I was also not sure what would happen if a student did not sign it – and, of course, asking a question about "what would happen if ..." would let the doctrinal cat out of the bag. At the Bible college, I did become more experientially appreciative of the breadth of the Christian Church. Bob's father was a Catholic and clearly a "real Christian." I also was able to visit a variety of culturally and doctrinally different churches.

After graduating from the Bible college, I got a job as a tower-rigger which involved travel in the USA and internationally and provided great opportunities to interact with people of different cultures, sub-cultures, and faiths, and Christians of different traditions. I also, for several years, became pen pals with a few Egyptians. In 1986 I was able to visit these pen pals and in 1989 I moved to Egypt to study Arabic and later studied for my MA in TEFL and taught English. My Arab friends – both Muslims



and Christians (and one Baha'i) – and the stories I heard from them about the Palestine-Israeli conflict created additional cognitive dissonance. Again, interactions with people across faith and cultural difference caused me to (further) rethink my theology (including the final dismissal of Christian Zionism), my politics, my understanding of history. Over the next ten years in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), I also learned a lot about Islam, Eastern Christianity, and Middle East culture – partially from study, but mostly from interaction with friends. In this process, I also learned a lot about myself, my culture, and my faith. Often various Muslim friends who were sincere believers and I discussed our faiths. We shared with conviction what we believed and practiced – both the similar and different beliefs and practices, and why we believed and practiced these things. (I later taught at another university in the Middle East and was involved in interfaith dialogue more formally. I helped students start an interfaith dialogue student organization and served as its first faculty advisor. I explain more about this in chapter four.)

When I moved back to the USA in 1999, and especially after 9-11, I was troubled by the negative reactions and attitudes many Americans had toward Arabs and Muslims. I was bothered, even hurt, by the comments and attitudes. Hearing about disrespectful, even violent interaction across faith and worldview difference, like that mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is always sad and depressing, but seeing negative attitudes, readiness to believe the worst, fear and anger among my relatives, friends and acquaintances was, though less extreme, harder to deal with. Seeing similar negative attitudes and public statements from Christians was also difficult. While my journey had been challenging to my faith, and many of my beliefs had changed, I still was committed

to my faith, and I still associated with evangelical (if not fundamentalist) churches. Some of the main changes in my faith related to how I believed Christians should interact across faith or worldview difference. I realized that, like many young people in conservative churches even until today, my earlier church experience prepared me to defend my faith to others, but not to discuss my faith with others. I also realized that the main thing that changed me from a monologic to a dialogic stance was actually interacting with others. I wanted to do what I could to encourage other Christians to consider this kind of a change in their stance toward others.

But how to do this? They had not sat and joked with Mahmoud and Rafiq in an Egyptian ‘ahwa (coffee shop) or talked with Abdullah and his friends in his men’s majlis (sitting room) while my wife chatted with his wife and other women in the women’s majlis (in the UAE) – or any of a host of other interactions and experiences. Perhaps I could encourage this change of attitude and stance through telling my stories, talking about my good friends, finding ways to challenge negative stereotypes through analogies about Christians, highlighting biblical stories and principles that are often neglected (e.g. the story of Isaac and Ishmael *together* burying their father Abraham) to challenge Christian Zionism, and honestly dealing with the complexity and tough, negative details that they would bring up (e.g. the Quranic verse, “Slay the infidels wherever you find them” (9:5)).

I started teaching adult education classes at the church I attended (and later in different formats at other churches) on the topic of Understanding Muslims and Arabs, and later more generally on interfaith dialogue and Christians engaging others in a pluralistic world. Fortunately, I have been able to see significant change in some

participants. Patty told me that when she and her husband went on a cruise vacation, they befriended a Muslim couple, whom, she said, they would have, previous to my course, avoided. Jack, at the beginning of a weekend workshop, told me very clearly his negative opinions of Arabs and Muslims. By the end of the weekend, he accepted and promised to read *Blood Brothers*, an autobiography of Elias Chacour (a Palestinian Christian), which tells of his family being forced from their ancestral home in the village of Biram (in northern Galilee) in 1948 by Israeli soldiers (Chacour & Hazard, 2013 originally published in 1984).

But there is also resistance to my teaching. One person eloquently expressed his opposition to interfaith dialogue with the remark, “Look where dialogue got Eve!” Often the opposition to my teaching is in the context of appreciation for the same teaching. For example, I heard a vague negative report after visiting one church from a pastor that had talked to the pastor there. At the church, after I spoke about how we as Christians should relate with Muslims, there were several positive comments, and only one negative one – a man was not happy that I criticized a writer at a Christian organization that he apparently liked. (I was actually surprised by his objection. This writer had blogged that the “Christian thing to do” was to stop Muslim immigration and deport Muslims immigrants living in the United States. I said this person was *not* loving others like Jesus did.) The most concerning opposition was when, after some changes in leadership at the church I attended, I was told that I could no longer teach or “have any public forum” at the church. The reasons the leadership gave related to the dialogic stance I was advocating as a good way for Christians to engage in a diverse, pluralistic world. I was told that I was

“confused” about interfaith dialogue and the “proclamation of the Gospel,” which, for them seems to require a certain, monologic stance.

### **Connections to My Research**

I want to discuss several ways that my life experience connects to my research. First, my motivation to pursue this research comes from my life experience and interactions. In some ways, I have been researching interfaith, inter-worldview, and intra-faith interactions and relations for decades. I embarked on this project because I wanted to do more robust, academic research so I could better understand my own attitudes and interactions, those of people I care about personally, and those of people whose stories I haven’t heard yet, by putting these experiences and observations in conversation with ideas and research in rhetoric studies.

I also have a very practical orientation or approach to research because of my life-connection to what I am studying. My second research question – about how greater understanding can facilitate (more) peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous interaction across faith and worldview difference – is a very important part of my research. There are some ways I have incorporated earlier findings into my teaching during my classroom research, with, I will show, some good success (which encourages me). I look forward to further chances to “use” what I have discovered from my research.

Another way my life experience is connected to my research is the way that I have been and am situated in and between different communities. This has provided opportunities to learn (and research) the attitudes and experiences of people in these communities toward and with those in other communities. It has also provided opportunities to try to facilitate attitudes and interactions that are (more) peaceful,

respectful, genuine, and generous (but I do not always succeed at this). While being between communities can, at times, be uncomfortable or stressful, and can position me at the edge of the different communities, (it is also very enriching and) I feel I have been able to be a bridge of sorts between the communities. I feel that I have been able to help my Muslim friends understand Christians and vice-versa. I also am or have been part of the two main (and increasingly different) groups of evangelical Christians that over the past several years have been growing further apart. These groups have been called the neo-fundamentalists and the moderate to progressive evangelicals by one scholar who considers the split to effectively have already taken place (Olson, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). The difference that matters to me is in the different rhetorical stances toward others that tend to be held by those in the different groups, as I explained above. I also find myself trying to bridge between communities of “conservative evangelical Christians” and “liberal academics in the humanities” that I am or have been part of. I have found there is a lot of fear, anger and sometimes hate – as well as lots of mutual ignorance and misunderstanding between these groups. I have tried to dispel ignorance and encourage and create openness, and even opportunities for dialogue. I once invited two friends to come and be interviewed by me and answer questions from participants in an adult-education course I was teaching at the church I attended. One friend identifies as atheist (and grew up in a Christian family) and the other identifies as bi-sexual. While the church leadership was apprehensive about this interview (only one friend ending up being able to take part), it went very well. All involved were respectful and the participants in the class expressed their appreciation for the understanding and perspective it gave them; it was one of the most appreciated class sessions of the course. I also have a particular

interest in structuring the university courses I teach in ways that encourage students from conservative religious backgrounds (like mine), who have heard the warnings about “secular university” and have only been prepared to defend their faith to others and not to discuss their faith with others, to thoughtfully and openly engage across the many faith and worldview differences they are facing. (And I mean openly in two ways – open-mindedly, willing to seek to integrate and synthesize their new learning with their strong beliefs; and openly as in not hiding – that they are able to find appropriate ways and stances from which to interact with others about their faith and what it means to them.) Much of this is rhetoric – creating appropriate rhetorical space for interactions and encouraging the adoption of appropriate rhetorical stances (which I will further discuss in chapters four and five).

Finally, I would like to explain that because this is my first venture into this personal-scholarly connected research, this study is broad and exploratory in many ways. My goal was to gain a broad understanding of the rhetorics of engagement across faith and worldview difference, especially as related to the contexts and communities I am or have been part of. I feel I have been successful in this. In addition to gaining understanding of various people’s attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference; I have also developed constructs (“rhetorical space” and “rhetorical stance”) which can be used in future study and in practical application.

### **Dialogic Critical Realism**

I would like to briefly explain the philosophical perspective from which I am approaching this research – dialogic critical realism. While this perspective of mine will be evident in various places throughout this work, especially in my discussion of rhetorical situation in chapter two, I believe that my research, findings, and

recommendations will hold regardless of the reader's philosophical perspective. I offer this, as I offered above my autobiographical writing, because it should aid in understanding my discussions, and to be transparent and open to critique.

As a dialogic critical realist, I am ontologically realist. I believe that there are entities that exist independent of our perception or discourse. However, I do not believe that, in our condition as human persons, it is possible for us to be certain that we have properly understood the nature of these entities. On the other hand, I am epistemologically constructivist. I believe that it is possible for us to put together or to “construct” some conception of some aspects of the world as we perceive and theorize it. Because I am not *ontologically* constructivist, I believe that some constructions are closer to reality or “the way things are” than others. I also believe that, based on continued *critical* engagement with the data of our perceptions of the world, we can continue to construct conceptions that come closer to the way things are, but we are always aware that our conceptions may be inaccurate and incomplete. I also like to think of the “critical” in critical realism as not just carrying the idea of critical as in critical analysis, but also the idea of critical as in critical theory – so I could call it dialogic critical critical realism. As a *critical* constructivist, I believe that the conceptions we construct are often hegemonically or coercively influenced by those who have power in our communities – and the conceptions they perpetuate help to maintain their privileged position. As we realize this and adjust our conceptions, they, hopefully, become more accurate. Finally, I am a *dialogic* critical realist. While this idea is included in some understandings of critical realism, I added the word dialogic to emphasize that another way we “spiral in” with more accurate conceptions is by dialogue with others who are constructing

conceptions from different perspectives. Another name for (a form of) critical realism that I like is “multi-perspectival realism” (term coined by Wimsatt, reported in Maxwell, 2012, pp. 4–5). I believe that, based on our “critical, critical” engagement with the data and our dialogic engagement with other epistemological constructivists, we can gain a better idea of the way things are.

### **Overview of Chapters**

In this dissertation, given the quite varied potentials of interactions across faith and worldview difference, I put scholarship that endorses a broader conception of rhetoric in conversation with my personal experience in interfaith relations and dialogue in order to discover better ways to explore and analyze people’s attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference. I also suggest ways to facilitate engagement that is (more) peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous.

In chapter two I explore previous research and thought in rhetoric studies to find concepts or understandings that could guide or inform my study of interactions across faith and worldview difference. Specifically, I explore the development of the concept of the “rhetorical situation.” I also discuss changes in the concept of rhetoric that better fit with my study. Finally, I review the function of rhetoric in identity and community formation. In chapter three I report on classroom research I performed in three undergraduate courses I taught. These courses explored various kinds of interfaith interaction (from violent to peaceful) in today’s world and required students to engage with others of different faiths outside the classroom. This research provided data about students’ attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference. In chapter four and five I explain the constructs of “rhetorical space” and “rhetorical stance” which I developed to explore and analyze interaction across and about



faith and worldview difference. I also use these two constructs to develop and frame recommendations designed to facilitate interaction that is (more) peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous. In chapter six I summarize my research and offer a “toolbox” of practical, useful tools for facilitating this kind of engagement across faith and worldview difference.

As I mentioned above, my interest in this is personal and practical. It is my hope that the knowledge gained and the tools developed will actually help people experience beautiful and enriching engagement across difference – and then help others to experience the same.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTEXTS, CHARACTERIZATIONS, AND COMMUNITIES OF RHETORIC: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As I stated in the previous chapter, this research aims to discover how rhetoric studies can be used to explore and analyze one of the toughest “rhetorical issues” around today – interaction across and about faith and worldview difference. In this chapter I will discuss selected rhetoric studies scholarship that explores and discusses aspects of rhetoric that are relevant to and have informed my research on interactions across faith and worldview difference. Specifically I have developed the constructs of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance (which I discuss in chapters four and five) by putting these rhetoric scholars in conversation with each other and with my experience and study of interfaith and inter-worldview interactions. The three aspects of rhetoric which I will discuss are:

- the “contexts” of rhetoric, or the “rhetorical situation” and different ideas about how the “situation” and “rhetoric” are related;
- the characterizations of rhetoric, including those that privilege monologic, unilateral, power-based, instrumental<sup>3</sup> persuasion and those that challenge these (traditional) characterizations; and
- the function of rhetoric in identity and community formation.

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<sup>3</sup> My usage of “instrumental” will follow Czubaroff’s. She writes, “Regardless, the instrumental rhetor is committed to her point of view and goal and is focused on gaining the other’s acquiescence or assent, in the context of a unilateral, relatively impersonal, sometimes even objectifying relationship” (2000, p. 174).

I start my survey with one of the most referenced, and most critiqued, concepts related to the “contexts” of rhetoric, Lloyd Bitzer’s (1968) “rhetorical situation.” While engaging Bitzer and his critics, I, and many of the scholars I converse with here, are, in many ways, discussing and critiquing traditional western conceptions of rhetoric more generally, for example what Edbauer calls “conglomeration [of distinct elements] models” (2005, p. 8) and Czubaroff calls “the rhetoric-as-persuasion tradition” (2007, p. 33).

As I engage with Bitzer, his critics, and other scholars, I want to both challenge these traditional conceptions, exploring ways that they are incomplete and inadequate, *and* suggest ways they can be changed or extended or held in tension with other conceptions in order to better understand interaction across difference. For example, I explain an approach to rhetoric that holds in tension realism and deconstruction which I use, in part, to develop two important aspects of a rhetorical stance that facilitates peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference. I also suggest that a broader, more dialogic conception of rhetoric that values personal, relational, and ethical aspects is more appropriate for the study of rhetorics of engagement across faith and worldview difference.

### **“Contexts” of Rhetoric**

In my study of the rhetorics of interactions across and about faith and worldview difference, and in my study of rhetoric more generally, I have become convinced of the importance of context. Our understanding of the rhetoric of human persons’ and groups’ interactions across difference will be shallow, incomplete, and often inaccurate if we do

not understand deeply and broadly the contexts “in which” rhetoric “happens.”<sup>4</sup> This idea will be evident in this chapter and throughout my dissertation, especially as I explore (in chapters four and five) “rhetorical space” and “rhetorical stance” as the contexts of rhetorical performance. In this section, after a brief review of Bitzer’s original article on the rhetorical situation and some of the response to it over the years, I will discuss the realist orientation of his model, some strong critiques of his realist orientation, and an alternative model that incorporates some of the critiques and suggests a good way of conceiving the study of interactions across faith and worldview difference.

### **Lloyd Bitzer’s Rhetorical Situation**

Lloyd Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation” was published in the first issue of *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. What I appreciate about this article is Bitzer’s desire to develop an “adequate conception” of rhetorical situation as a way to explore and understand, not “the nature of rhetorical discourse,” but “the nature of those *contexts* in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse” (Bitzer, 1968, pp. 1–3 emphasis added). Bitzer emphasizes that, for the purposes of his exploration, he is separating the context or situation from the discourse that is produced in the context or situation. Bitzer also emphasizes that rhetorical situations can exist without rhetorical discourse. He writes, “While the existence of a rhetorical address is a reliable sign of the existence of situation, it does not follow that a situation exists only when the discourse exists” (p. 2). He then reminds us of times when we all have been faced with some kind of “urgent

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<sup>4</sup> There are, of course, ways in which the (idea of a) distinction or “boundary” between rhetoric and its “context” is (and should be) complicated, not least in the discussion of realism in this section, or the later discussion of identity and rhetoric. However, “context” remains, and I will employ it as, a useful term to refer to that which surrounds the rhetorical performance.

matter” and had a chance to speak, but didn’t. I appreciate Bitzer’s characterization of the situation as “calling” for discourse (p. 2).<sup>5</sup>

In the article he defines rhetorical situation as:

a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (Bitzer, 1968, p. 6)

Bitzer also suggests three constituents of any rhetorical situation. The first, exigence, is the “real world” imperfection that needs to be – and can be changed. The second constituent of rhetorical situation is audience. Audience “consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). A rhetorical situation also has constraints which are “made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to mollify the exigence” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). These are the required constituents of any rhetorical situation, which, Bitzer emphasizes, can exist without rhetorical discourse. If, however, “the orator, invited by situation, enters it and creates and presents discourse, both he and his speech are additional constituents” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8).

In addition to some initial critiques (Brinton, 1981; Larson, 1970; Pomeroy, 1972; Wilkerson, 1970) and the more serious challenges described below, Bitzer’s rhetorical situation is still very much cited and critiqued in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. In the introduction to a 25 year anniversary supplement of *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, that

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<sup>5</sup> I also find it interesting that the third example Bitzer uses at the beginning of the article is “an ethical situation.”

contained a reprint of Bitzer's article, Carroll Arnold (1992) mentioned that, although Bitzer extended his ideas in 1980 (in "Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective"), he did not substantially change his original understanding. Google Scholar shows the 1992 reprint of Bitzer's article as being "cited by 1908" other articles or books – with 1080 of these citations in the last ten years ("Lloyd Bitzer 'the rhetorical situation' - Google Scholar," 2014).<sup>6</sup> Very recently, Kendall Phillips briefly critiqued Bitzer's rhetorical situation as being inadequate to make sense of the contexts of dissent, where, in addition to the "complex indeterminacy" of spaces of dissent, the "invitation" is for a response that does *not* "fit" (2015, p. 64). Sharon McKenzie Stevens, in an article encouraging the rethinking of the rhetorical situation in the context of student involvement in social movements, laments the ubiquity of a traditional understanding of Bitzer's rhetorical situation as demonstrated by its presence in current, well-known writer's handbooks (Stevens, 2009, pp. 49–50). However, some teachers are critical. For example, Brian Gogan in a piece which discusses "authenticity" in writing assignments critiques the near "circularity" of Bitzer's explanations of rhetorical exigence: "*authentic* rhetoric responds to *real* rhetoric situations and modifies a *genuine* exigence; authenticity is defined by reality that is defined by genuineness" (2014, p. 544 emphasis original).

### **Realism and the "Gift of Deconstruction"**

In this section I will examine two articles in some depth that challenge Bitzer's realist philosophical orientation. I will demonstrate how these two scholars' challenges are valid and beneficial, but should be held in productive tension with a realist

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<sup>6</sup> Anne-Wil Harzing (2008) defends the use of Google Scholar for citation analysis, finding it is as good as or better than paid subscription tools.

orientation, at least at some practical, provisional level. This productive tension, I will argue, provides a platform from which rhetoric scholars can make contributions of greater ethical significance. I also use this tension, in part, to develop two important aspects of a rhetorical stance that facilitates peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference. In this section, I will first put the two articles in conversation with Bitzer and with each other, then I will explain how I recommend that all three be held in tension.

Perhaps the most well-known response to Bitzer is an article by Robert Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” (1973). Vatz challenged Bitzer’s philosophically realist conception of an exigence or a “real world” situation calling for or requiring a response. He turned Bitzer on his head. Vatz writes,

I would not say “rhetoric is situational,” but situations are rhetorical; not “...exigence strongly invites utterance,” but utterance strongly invites exigence; not “the situation controls the rhetorical response . . .” but the rhetoric controls the situational response; not “ . . . rhetorical discourse . . . does obtain its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it,” but situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them. (1973, p. 159)

Vatz maintains that rhetoric creates salience or meaning or “the situation” by two steps. First, the rhetor chooses which events to communicate about. Second, the rhetor translates or interprets the chosen information about the event – thus “creating” the situation.

Relatively recently, in an article entitled “The Mythical Status of Situational Rhetoric: Implications for Rhetorical Critics’ Relevance in the Public Arena” (2009),

Vatz reviewed “some important academic implications” of Bitzer’s and his original articles. As Vatz reflects how these two articles have influenced research, he admits “if the competition between these perspectives has been a 35-year footrace, it has been won by Bitzer’s philosophy.” (2009, p. 2) Vatz repeats the arguments made in his original Myth article and adds a pragmatic argument. He suggests that if, over the past 35 years, the profession had been doing more explaining how rhetoric creates salience and meaning (as opposed to merely describing the situation where the rhetoric is located), “we” (as scholars of rhetoric) would have higher status and have made contributions of greater ethical significance. He claims that if all we can do is describe the situation, there are subject specialists who can do a better job – as they know the situation better. Vatz sees the political usage of the terms “agenda” and “framing” or “spin” as popular representations (and vindications) of his idea that rhetoric creates salience and meaning.

Barbara Biesecker (1989) in her article, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Différance” also challenges Bitzer’s – and Vatz’s realism. Biesecker points out that Vatz simply reverses Bitzer’s causal hierarchy, suggesting that speaker, not situation is the “position of origin.” Biesecker suggests that Vatz, by upsetting this hierarchy, “unwittingly uncovers and undoes the operation responsible for hierarchization and, thus, displaces both the foundational logic of his own and Bitzer’s argument.” (p 115) Biesecker suggests that “Derrida's *différance* effects a link between deconstruction and the analysis of rhetorical texts by supplying rhetorical critics with a mechanism that enables them to specify more adequately the rhetoricity of a text.” (p 116) She sees the value of deconstruction as freeing us from the (foundationalist) Bitzer-Vatz “either-or” which forces a choice between situation or subject as origin, thus



allowing us to take the rhetoricity of discursive practices seriously. Différance provides an alternative way to understand the rhetorical situation as not being composed of “fixed essences,” but as “an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations.” (p 126) While Biesecker is excited about the “gift of deconstruction” that provides “a space wherein it becomes possible for us to discern the considerable heterogeneity of the social sphere and the formidable role that rhetoric plays in articulating this heterogeneity,” she is aware of the possibility of taking deconstruction “too far.” Near the end of her article she writes,

My attempt to use deconstructive insights as means through which the rhetorical situation can be rethought was not meant to suggest that traditional rhetorical theories and critical practices are indefensible or that they should be replaced by Derridean deconstruction. I take deconstructive practice as one possible way to re-invigorate the field, not as the first step towards a renunciation of it.

(Biesecker, 1989, p. 127)

I appreciate Vatz’s pointing out the (possibility of the) creation of salience or “situation” by rhetoric, and his mention of the frequency of this happening in American society (especially in politics). I agree with Vatz that, “To view rhetoric as a creation of reality or salience rather than a reflector of reality clearly increases the rhetor’s moral responsibility.” (1973, p 158) I also agree with Vatz that rhetoric scholars have an opportunity (and I would argue an obligation) to make contributions of ethical significance – which includes pointing out and challenging creation of reality or salience through rhetoric – which he does in his critique of recent (at the time) political rhetorical performance.

I also appreciate Biesecker's critique of Vatz and Bitzer. I would agree with Biesecker that Vatz is still realist and that his simply reversing Bitzer's hierarchy does not "fix" Bitzer's conception of rhetorical situation, but points to the need for deeper critique of it. I find Biesecker's use of deconstruction to rethink the rhetorical situation compelling and agree that it helps us to take the rhetoricity of discursive practices seriously. Yet, I also (with Biesecker, I believe) have some concerns about the possible implications of a deconstructive rethink of the rhetorical situation – and how this rethink could be pursued by some.<sup>7</sup> One concern I want to discuss here relates to rhetoric and ethical responsibility in the context of interfaith relations.

At this point, I would like to bring in a specific example that will practically illustrate my concern about the possible implications of a deconstructive rethink taken too far, and will show the practical benefit of holding the deconstructive rethink in productive tension with a pragmatic, provisional (ontological) realism. As I mentioned in chapter one, I have been involved in leading "Understanding Muslims and Arabs" classes and seminars in Christian churches. On many occasions I have heard Christians ask questions that "created" (negative) reality about Muslims. One variation is, "If most Muslims are really against terrorism, why aren't they publicly saying anything against terrorism?" This loaded question assumes, wrongly, that Muslims are *not* saying anything against terrorism. The question also not-so-subtly suggests its own answer – that most Muslims really are *not* really against terrorism, they are secretly *for* it. At this practical level, I

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<sup>7</sup> While not specifically addressing the topic of rhetorical situation, I believe Booth's (2009, pp. 77–81) reading of Derrida and his (Booth's) challenge of totally deconstructionist readings of Derrida resonates to some extent with my understanding of Biesecker's reading of Derrida, and with the concerns I am discussing here. On the other hand, I would suggest that Raúl Sánchez's (2005) discussion of deconstruction and composition may be, as Biesecker does *not* want to do, "tak[ing] deconstructive practice as ... the first step towards a renunciation of [the field of rhetoric and composition]." (1989, p. 127)

believe that Bitzer, Vatz, Biesecker, and I would all agree that any person who hears this question bears at least some ethical responsibility to check the accuracy of the implications of this loaded question (Muslims don't speak out against terrorism) before repeating it and thus helping to further "create reality."<sup>8</sup> And, I think we would all also agree that I (as a person; as a rhetoric scholar; and as a someone who has lived in the Middle East, studied Islam, and has many Muslim friends) have a heightened (and inescapable) ethical responsibility to, if I am able, challenge those I hear asking this question – to share my experience in the Muslim world, or to show them a Christian white supremacist web site and ask them if all Christians are racists, or to encourage them to Google "Muslims against terrorism" – and look at just a handful of the thousands of results that Google returns – clear statements by Muslim groups, leaders, and lay people condemning acts of terror by other Muslims, and strongly disagreeing with their interpretations of the Quran that justify acts of terror.<sup>9</sup>

It seems to me that, in order for us to successfully challenge a friend who asks this question, *and* in order to meaningfully assert that repeating this question to others is unethical, it has to be the case that (or we need to have evidence demonstrating the high probability that) Muslims have indeed made these clear statements. If it is not the case that Muslims have made these clear statements OR if it is not possible for us (to perceive

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<sup>8</sup> It is my experience that most people I have heard asking questions or making statements like this are not aware of Muslim statements against terrorism. Of course a person who repeats this question who is aware of Muslim statements against terrorism bears a much greater moral responsibility. When I challenge fellow Christians about these kind of statements, I remind them of the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." (Exodus 20:16) I also sometimes point out that this commandment is not simply, "Don't lie," but shows (God's) concern about the societal effects of not (seeking and) speaking the truth.

<sup>9</sup> At a deeper level, one could examine culturally-appropriate ways of communicating this message to the perpetrators of violence in an honor/shame based culture. Clear, strong, public statements and censure (so appreciated in the West) may not have the desired effect in the non-West – at least not as a first step. For just one example of cross-cultural misunderstanding, consider the much reported refusal of Abd il Rauf to call Hamas a terrorist organization - because it would "sap his ability to build bridges" (Barnard, 2010)

or) to use language or discourse to reference these statements by Muslims at least at some level, then we are not able to challenge our friend or to make claims about the ethicality of her repeating the question. If there is not a “situation” that obtains and which can be meaningfully referenced, then any challenge related to that situation seems significantly weakened. (Of course, our friend might argue that Muslims did not make the statements they are reported to have made, or that the statements are not clear or strong enough, etc., but this is a question of evidence, not philosophy.) Since many of us would want to challenge a friend who asks a question or makes a statement like this, it seems that, at least on some provisional or practical or methodological level, we must retain some form of realism in order for our challenge of our friend to be meaningful.<sup>10</sup> I would suggest that, as rhetoric scholars, we need to consider how we (can or should) hold in tension the (at least) practical and provisional realism of daily life, perception, and discourse; and the challenges and insights of the “gift of deconstruction.”<sup>11</sup>

As I mentioned in chapter one, I am coming to this project with a dialogic critical realist approach, and this is probably evident in the preceding paragraphs. This approach, with its realist ontology and constructivist epistemology, provides, for me, a good way to hold these philosophical and rhetorical ideas in productive tension. I agree that Bitzer’s realism is flawed because he seems to accept not only a realist ontology, which I would agree with, but also an (uncomplicated) realist epistemology. Vatz, while criticizing

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<sup>10</sup> Notice that my comments here are only about (ontological) realism, not moral realism, which is a related and important, but distinct discussion. In other words, I am talking about the importance of our belief (at some level) that a state of affairs exists independent of our (possibly mistaken) perceptions or discourses in which Muslims have (or have not) made statements against acts of terror by self-identified Muslims. I am not talking about beliefs about whether lying or misrepresentation (which hurts others) is or can be considered morally wrong in some absolute sense.

<sup>11</sup> I would suggest that this issue is also illustrated by a frustrating situation we may have experienced where a friend responds to our clear, logical, supported argument about some issue we care deeply about, not by contesting the logical structure of our argument, or challenging some of the facts we presented, but simply with, “That’s just the way *you* see it.”

Bitzer's realism, seems to (unconsciously?) keep a realist ontology, but does seem to adopt a constructivist epistemology. Vatz does not just describe "rhetoric as a creation of reality," but criticizes it and talks about the "potential culpability" of John F. Kennedy for the "missile crisis" he "created" (1973, p. 158-160). I would agree with Vatz's apparent critical realism and his desire for rhetoric scholars to make contributions of greater ethical significance. However, with Biesecker and Edbauer (see below), I find that Vatz's critique does not go far enough and does not recognize sufficiently the complexity of the "rhetorical situation." Not unlike Biesecker, I see deconstruction as not a nullification of "rhetorical situation" or its constituents, but as a productive way to open and explore the complexity, contingency, and rhetoricity of a "situation which calls [my] discourse into existence" (Bitzer, 1968, p. 2) that will hopefully move us closer to a more accurate (if imperfect and complex) understanding of the situation and the discourse, and enable us to better (inter)act in appropriate ways with those involved in or affected by it.<sup>12</sup>

I feel that it is important to address this intersection of philosophy and rhetoric studies not only for the ethical considerations mentioned above, but also because of other ways this discussion is connected to some aspects of interactions across faith and worldview difference. First, I want to point out the value of this productive tension in understanding and challenging both negative essentializing moves, like the loaded question discussed above, *and* positive essentializing moves. I will argue in chapter five that neither kind of essentializing move should be part of a rhetorical stance that aims to

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<sup>12</sup> I do not try to assess Biesecker's philosophical stance, as I did with Bitzer and Vatz, because it seems more complex than either of theirs. I do, as I indicate, resonate with her cautious embrace of deconstruction for what it can provide for rhetoric studies.

facilitate peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference.

Second, I will also argue in chapter five that rhetorical stances that privilege beliefs or aspects of a certain worldview or faith can cause those who do not agree with the belief or aspect to resist or refuse engagement. One commonly privileged (or perceived to be privileged) aspect is called “relativism” by those who resist or refuse engagement, and sometimes by those who are privileging it. Generally, it seems that this refers to a constructivist ontology. Thus this issue is relevant in the interactions or situations themselves, as well as in the rhetorical analysis of the situations. I would suggest that dialogic critical realism might also be usefully introduced into these situations where, typically, one group is “fully” constructivist (ontologically and epistemologically constructivist) and the other is “fully” realist (ontologically and epistemologically realist),<sup>13</sup> as a pragmatic, provisional or methodological way forward.

### **Ecologies and Ecotones**

Jenny Edbauer (2005), in an article that analyzes the public rhetoric of the Keep Austin (Texas) Weird campaign, offers a similar critique of Bitzer’s and Vatz’s conceptions of rhetorical situation and other frameworks that are a conglomeration of distinct elements. Without delving into philosophy as much as Biesecker does (but referencing her), Edbauer points out the variance and multiplicity within the elements of rhetorical situation, for example the variety of perceptions and receptions in a single audience, or the complexity and changeability of exigencies. Edbauer also recognizes

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<sup>13</sup> I have seen many references to this “fully realist” position as “naïve realism” – by those who would not hold that position. I am unaware if people would self-identify as naïve realists. While it seems to be an accurate description of the philosophical position, it seems pejorative to me, and thus I am uncomfortable using it and try not to, especially with those who would hold it.

that “elements” and situation are not static, but are active, historical, and lived processes that transcend artificial boundaries. As she puts it, “Situation bleeds into the concatenation of public interaction. Public interactions bleed into wider social processes. *The elements of rhetorical situation simply bleed.*” (p 9, emphasis original) Edbauer seeks a model that understands rhetoric as a “public(s) creation” that she can practically apply to her analysis of public rhetoric. Thus, she proposes

a framework of *affective ecologies* that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes, ... a revised strategy for theorizing public rhetorics (and rhetoric’s publicness) as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events by shifting the lines of focus from *rhetorical situation* to *rhetorical ecologies*. (p 9 emphasis original)

Edbauer’s affective ecologies framework emphasizes networks, distributed emergence, and ongoing circulation in ways that do not impose artificial boundaries or systems on the public rhetoric she analyzes.

I appreciate Edbauer’s practical metaphor and model of rhetorical ecologies. I find that it offers an appropriate way to think about, study, and explain the complex, changing, interrelated networks of relations and living processes of rhetorical discourse without containing or limiting or artificially dividing them, or potentially imposing on them an “understanding” (e.g. as “rhetorical situation” does with its goal-focused orientation). Like the study of ecologies in nature, this kind of study of the interactions of communities of human persons follows the living processes and networks, exploring history, connections, experiences, power relations, etc. to get the best possible grounded understanding of the “ecology”. Edbauer’s study of rhetorical ecologies resonates with

the way I explore “rhetorical space” in chapter four. Like Edbauer, I start with the interactions of interest and trace the connections found in that environment, not imposed on it. My exploration of the rhetorical space of interactions across (faith and worldview) difference extends Edbauer’s concept of rhetorical ecologies by adding the concept of “rhetorical ecotones”. Ecotones are transition areas where two ecosystems or communities meet and integrate (“Ecotone,” 2015).<sup>14</sup> In nature, ecotones can be sharp and clear boundaries or they can be more gradual transitions between communities. The edge effects or changes that happen in population or community structures in these ecotonal areas can allow for greater biodiversity or species richness, or can be detrimental, which, unfortunately, can happen more frequently when human activity creates the ecotonal area, e.g. fertilizer run-off into the edge of a forest (“Edge effects,” 2014). As I pointed out in chapter one, rhetorical ecotones of interaction across faith or worldview difference have similar multivalent potentials – for sharp boundaries with very little significant interaction; for violent, even deadly, clash and conflict; for shallow or superficial “tolerance”; or for peaceful, enriching, beautiful growth and development.

Ecotone and ecological boundary theory has been developed in the field of ecology, for example in developing classification systems for different aspects of boundaries (Strayer, Power, & Fagan, 2003), developing tools to permit synthesis of studies in different environments and on different scales (Cadenasso, Pickett, & Weathers, 2003), and understanding comparisons of very different ecotones that share some characteristics (Malanson, Zeng, & Walsh, 2006). Other fields have used ecotones as analogies or as possible ways to understand non-ecological phenomena, e.g.

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, “the word ecotone was coined from a combination of *eco*(logy) plus *-tone*, from the Greek *tonos* or tension – in other words, a place where ecologies are in tension” (“Ecotone,” 2015).



economics (Gallaway, 2005), education (Brown, Pendleton-Jullian, & Adler, 2010), and sociology (Yukich & Braunstein, 2014).

My construct of rhetorical space includes a set of tools – or questions designed to build understanding of the other. A biologist might do surveys of various species' populations, measure areas of different kinds of vegetation, write descriptions of the area, use various instruments to analyze the soil or water, etc. in order to understand the land, the various species, and their interactions in the ecosystem. If the biologist were studying an ecotone, she would use additional techniques and tools to discover the tensions unique to that particular transition between ecosystems. Similarly, in chapter four, I offer a set of questions rhetoric scholars can use to discover and better understand the complex, changing, living, interrelated, networked relations and processes, *and* tensions that are present in the rhetorical ecotones. The highly varied potentials of the rhetorical ecotones of interactions across faith and worldview difference mentioned above highlight the importance of good tools and techniques to accurately learn about and understand these rhetorical ecotones.<sup>15</sup>

### **Characterizations of Rhetoric**

As an extension to the above conversation about core philosophical differences in how we think about rhetorical situations or ecologies, in this section I explore different ways rhetoric has been characterized or defined in different traditions or models. I suggest that a broader, more dialogic conception of rhetoric that values personal,

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<sup>15</sup> “Ecotone” is also the name of a semiannual journal “that seeks to reimagine place [as it] brings together the literary and the scientific, the personal and the biological, the urban and the rural ... embrac[ing] and celebrat[ing] these ecotones by breaking out of the pen of the purely literary and wandering freely among the disciplines.” (“Ecotone | About,” n.d.)

relational, and ethical aspects is more appropriate for the study of rhetorics of engagement across faith and worldview difference.

### **The Cost of “Me, My Goals, and Monologue”**

Bitzer’s model of rhetorical situation seems rather individualistic and goal-focused. An individual rhetor senses a need that she wants to do something about. She realizes that she can attain her goal, or perhaps attain it more efficiently and/or more effectively, with some kind of help from others – and that there is at least some likelihood that they could be convinced to help by her talking to them – if she can navigate the “constraints” of the situation. So she talks to them and they are convinced – or not. And that’s it? It seems that a lot is left out – or perhaps not left out, but all bundled into the constituent of constraints – which I would suggest, by its name, suggests an instrumental attitude toward “persons, events, objects, and relations” – focusing attention on whether they are preventing me from (or assisting me in) getting my goal accomplished. I would suggest there are better ways to include “persons, events, objects, and relations” than as “parts of the situation [that] have the power to constrain decision and action needed to mollify the exigence” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). Again, Bitzer is not wrong here. I would agree that, not only are Bitzer’s constituents parts (but not all parts) of many (and perhaps all?) rhetorical situations, there are both participants in and observers of rhetorical situations that would perceive that this is *all* that is happening – or only focus on this. Also, this is not just a critique of Bitzer’s concept of rhetorical situation, but more generally of what Jeanine Czubaroff (2007) calls “the rhetoric-as-persuasion tradition.”

I would first like to suggest that we should expand our understanding of “the rhetorical situation” to include the personal, relational, and ethical dimensions of the situation (as primary aspects, not constraints). We should also consider these dimensions

of the “rhetorical outcomes” – what were the personal, relational and ethical outcomes of the discourse – and not simply pay attention to whether the audience was persuaded, and whether the rhetoric “produce[d] action or change in the world.” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 4)

When we expand our understanding of the rhetorical situation – or rhetoric itself – to include these dimensions, it necessarily entails a consideration of two-way or dialogic interaction.

There has been (renewed) study of dialogue as a key aspect of human interaction in philosophy over the last one hundred years.<sup>16</sup> Then starting in the mid-1960’s scholars of communication studies started to develop an interest in this more recent exploration of dialogue.<sup>17</sup> Jeanine Czubaroff (2012) reviews dialogue research in communication studies from the mid 1960’s to the present, focusing on the subfield of rhetorical and argumentation studies.<sup>18</sup> In her conclusion, she writes:

As I consider the essays in this review as a whole, I note, especially, a persistent call for an enlarged conception of rhetoric that concerns itself not only with the myriad symbolic forms and media of the contemporary scene, and not only with

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<sup>16</sup> Tullio Maranhão identifies three schools or traditions of the study of dialogue in philosophy that eventually coalesced: “the postmodern framework of Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard; the ‘universal neo-pragmatist’ framework of Habermas and Rorty; and the philosophical anthropological and phenomenological framework of Buber, Bakhtin, Gadamer, and Levinas.” (Czubaroff, 2012, p. 45)

<sup>17</sup> Obviously, the word dialogue and the concept has been part of ordinary language and used in various ways scholarly since at least ancient Greek times. Also, starting in the mid to late 1900’s there was a turn to dialogue generally in the human / social sciences and (somewhat later) in western society more generally. (see, e.g. Puigvert, 2012)

<sup>18</sup> Two other review articles contribute to a good understanding of how this turn to dialogue was taken up in communication studies. Rob Anderson, Leslie Baxter, and Kenneth Cissna (2004) offer an introduction to the “texts and contexts of dialogic traditions in communication studies.” They briefly explain the contributions of four “touchstone theorists” who are commonly cited in communication studies: Martin Buber, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Anderson, et al. also mention several key early “signal publications” in communication studies and explore the contexts or ways in which dialogue is “used” in communication studies. Similarly, John Stewart, Karen Zediker, and Laura Black (2004) explore, from a communication studies perspective, the commonalities of five key philosophers of dialogue: Buber, Bakhtin, David Bohm, Paolo Freire, and Gadamer. Stewart, et al. discuss these philosophers shared commitment to holism and tensionality; variations in their understandings of dialogue; and their life experiences which informed their commitment to dialogue.

strategic, instrumental discourse, but also with discourse which invites and facilitates the exchange of perspectives, constitutes persons and builds relationships and community, and, finally, collaborates in the face of conflicts. ... This theme of rhetoric as relational, constitutive, and collaborative as well as functional and strategic is echoed through four decades of scholarship within rhetoric and within the larger field of communication. (Czubaroff, 2012, p. 60)

This turn to dialogue raises good questions to ask about any rhetorical situation, and challenges (and expands) the more traditional understanding of rhetorical situation (and rhetoric generally).

In addition to her review, Czubaroff explores and advocates for a broader understanding of rhetoric in her own work. Czubaroff uses Buber's philosophy of dialogue as a basis for a "dialogical/ontological rhetoric" that emphasizes the rhetor's response to the other and contrasts with the traditional instrumental conception of rhetoric (2000). Later, she develops and expands Argumentation Theory with insights from Boszormenyi-Nagy's contextual theory and discusses the implications for argument and rhetorical studies. Czubaroff emphasizes the relational context of rhetorical situations – and "because they involve persons in relation, are not only relational, they are multilateral and therefore ethical contexts" (2007, p. 32) Czubaroff nicely summarizes what she sees as a "critical deficiency in our concept of the rhetorical situation":

The problem with the rhetoric-as-persuasion tradition, then, is its tendency to privilege monological, unilateral power-based modes of influence and eclipse dialogical-multilateral modes of power and influence. What dialogue offers to counterbalance the abuses committed in the name of monological persuasion is

multilaterality, availability, and accountability, a willingness to stand one's ground *and* grant the other that same right. (2007, p. 33 emphasis original)

Czubaroff recommends the exploration of “when, why, and how monologue or dialogue has been preferenced, and with what relational and communal benefits and costs” (2007, p. 33). While challenging the default preference for instrumental, monological relating, she does not throw it out, but encourages a deeper and broader cost-benefit analysis than has typically been a part of evaluating rhetorical outcomes.

My approach to engagement across faith and worldview difference is a response to Czubaroff’s call for a broader conception of rhetoric that recognizes the abuses of one way, power-based, instrumental, monological persuasion; and suggests a dialogic approach to counterbalance these abuses. Czubaroff’s emphasis on accountability and “a willingness to stand one's ground *and* grant the other that same right” resonates with my push for a “genuine” rhetorical stance that avoids negative or positive essentializing moves. Also, as I report in chapters three and five, I have found that sincere, conservative believers, both leaders and others, often communicate about their faith with others in one way, power-based, instrumental, monological ways. I appreciate, and use when appropriate, Czubaroff’s cost-benefit analysis approach on a spiritual level with these sincere believers to encourage them to reconsider how they communicate when interacting with people of different faith – and possibly adopt a more dialogic approach. This has a much better chance of “working,” than just recommending a more dialogic approach, because, as I discuss in chapters four and five, based on my experience, I believe that many sincere believers really do care for those they interact with, and are doing what they think (or have been told) they should be doing. Thus, asking them to

consider the effects of what they are doing (monologic “proclamation”) and exploring other options (e.g. dialogue across difference) and their effects has significant potential. I ask, “What is the best way to encourage these people you care for to *really think about and consider* the important information you want to share with them?” (Just to be clear, my goal in asking this question is *not* to dissuade sincere believers from witnessing, which is an integral aspect of their faith, but to convince them that a dialogic approach to witnessing would not only be more respectful of the other than a monologic approach, but might have a better chance of “working” – of getting the other to consider your message.) I also acknowledge that there are other religious rhetorical spaces where monological, power or authority-based rhetorical stances and performances may be more expected and acceptable, for example sermons after Friday noon prayers in a mosque or as a part of a Sunday morning worship service in a church.<sup>19</sup>

### **Rhetoric, Ethics, and Generosity**

In order to further consider the ethical aspect of “rhetorical situations” that Czubaroff mentions, I want to consider the work of communication and rhetoric scholars Michael Hyde (2004), Ronald Arnett (2004), and Jeffery Murray (2003, 2004). They have explored the ethical dimension of rhetoric in conversation with philosophers Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, and Martin Heidegger. Murray (2003, 2004) responds to Levinas’s critique of rhetoric as “a form of communication that is self-serving and that disregards the call of the Other”, and to his characterization of rhetoric as “preeminently violence” and as “approach[ing] his neighbor with ruse” (2003, p. 251). Murray contends that there is no rhetoric or “discourse” (Levinas’s alternative to rhetoric) free of

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<sup>19</sup> However, while not typical, I am aware of churches where the pastor takes a dialogic rhetorical stance and creates a dialogic rhetorical space for the sermon such that it resembles a class with a mix of mini-lectures and discussions more than an uninterrupted speech.

ideological distortion. Murray explores “how rhetoric can serve ethics”. Murray’s goal is “not to let the first word speak transparently because we assume it has already been overwritten”, but “to implement rhetorical strategies that empower the Other to contest the ubiquitous refractions of interpretive framing.” (2003, p. 251) To accomplish this, Murray offers two rhetorics: “a rhetoric of disruption designed to identify, challenge, and disrupt those ideological assumptions that work to mask the face” and “a rhetoric of supplication designed to create and maintain a communicative environment conducive to that unmasking” (2003, p. 252). One of the initial goals of dialogue based on these two rhetorics is a mutually acceptable acknowledgement of the Other – similar to Czubaroff’s (2007) emphasis on transparency and mutual accountability. Similarly, Hyde, in conversation with Levinas and Heidegger, explores the role “dialogue and acknowledgement” can play in our “everyday ways of being-with-and-for-others” (2004, p. 62). Arnett finds “a dialogic ethic ‘between’ Buber and Levinas” that “points to an alternative understanding of agency – a ‘responsive ethical I’” (2004, p. 76). In chapter five I identify a generous response to the call of the other as an important part of the rhetorical stance I am advocating. My generous response, like Murray’s rhetorics of disruption and supplication, seeks as much as is possible to invite others to construct their own images in my mind – and not to permit myself to change them. This is a vital part of being generously “with and for others” – engaging with others as they are, not as I assume or have been told they are. However, this ethical responsibility is difficult to observe consistently, partially because our ability or willingness to relate ethically in these contexts can be troubled by rhetoric’s connection with identity, which will be discussed in the last main section of this chapter.

## **Dialogic Engagement across Difference**

Another philosopher who has recently explored dialogue, but was not mentioned by Czubaroff or by any of the communication studies scholars referenced above, is Dmitri Nikulin. I find that several of his ideas mesh nicely with those above and are particularly appropriate for dialogue across faith and worldview difference. Nikulin (2010), explores the concepts of “dialectic and dialogue” (his book’s title) from classical times until the present. In line with Czubaroff’s contrast of traditional and dialogical understandings of rhetoric, Nikulin contrasts dialectic and dialogue. In dialectical reasoning, according to Nikulin, there is a lack of symmetry or equality between the one who asks and the one who replies. The dialectician asks leading questions the answers to which are often implied in the question. Thus, when “dialogue” is dialectical it becomes monological. Confirming, but in a sort of mirror image of, Czubaroff’s finding a consensus wishing for a broader (dialogical) understanding of rhetoric, Nikulin claims that dialectical methods have become universal methods and, “dialogue, therefore, is abandoned as philosophically unproductive, unsystematic, and utterly accidental to the process and acts of reasoning” (p. 72). Thus, his goal (in the second half of his book) is to reconstruct dialogue and “examine the features that make dialogue philosophically and ontologically important” (p. 72).

The four features of dialogue that Nikulin examines are personal other, voice, unfinalizability, and allosensus (an open alternative to consensus or dissensus). It was Nikulin’s discussion of these features of dialogue which really piqued my interest in his work. I found that Nikulin’s understandings and explanations both resonated with and further informed my thought about interfaith dialogue. The interfaith dialogue guidelines I developed when teaching in the Middle East include aspects of all four of these features.



Nikulin's four components of dialogue have also generally influenced various aspects of my constructs of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance discussed in chapters four and five. Specifically, these four aspects form the core of my recommendations for dialogic rhetorical space at the end of chapter four.

The first component of dialogue is the personal other. Nikulin is not just thinking of the other person in the dialogue, or that person's dialogue, although that is part of it, but he is suggesting that each of us has our own personal other. My personal other is not, as Nikulin is defining this, reducible to me. My personal other is the one I talk to when I dialogue with myself. And in dialogue with others, it is my personal other that they interact with. My dialogue partner, likewise, has her own personal other with whom my personal other interacts. Our personal others are not fully definable and can change. Nikulin asks why bother with this strange, hard to understand entity. He replies (as if in a dialogue) that, "being is not an abstract notion, but ... always a concrete *personal* being in dialogue with the other. ... *[T]o be*, and not just exist, is to be with the other, or *to be in dialogue*, the precondition of which is the personal other that is always fully present in dialogue but is never ultimately expressed in a finalized way." (Nikulin, 2010, p 75, emphasis original)

In addition to this metaphysical aspect related to being, identity, person-ness, and the other, there is also the much more concrete idea that dialogue at its core is all about persons. Dialogue, unlike dialectic, requires persons as persons – not merely idea-carriers. The person in dialogue is not known by logic, but by narration. (Nikulin, 2010, p87) Nikulin points out that for dialogue, there must be a plurality of equal, free persons.

(2010, p81) Following from this, the dialogue is polycentric and should not be directed from outside or by any person in the dialogue.

Voice is the second component of dialogue because each person is present in the dialogue through their voice. Nikulin's understanding of "voice" here is very literal – the actual voice that comes out of our mouths.<sup>20</sup> Each voice is unique, independent, personal, expressive, and interruptible. Yet the voice can join with other voices creating a "dialogical polyphony [which] presupposes non-imitative, non-simultaneous interaction" (Nikulin, 2010, p. 77). The voice expresses each person, but never finally. While the voice can be discursive, moving from one point to another, for example in a story or in a series of questions and answers, Nikulin is concerned about discursive thinking. If discursive thinking or systematic investigation proceeds without the voice of the other, it becomes dialectic. While Nikulin acknowledges a place for dialectic, his concern is that, as he sees happening in history, dialectic will neglect dialogue.

Nikulin's third key feature, unfinalizability, is linked to the first. Dialogue is unfinalizable because we as persons change. When we change, the dialogue changes. Since we will continue to change, the dialogue is unfinalizable. Dialogue is unlike a mere exchange of information, which, once finished can only be repeated. Dialogue's unfinalizability does not mean that it is deficient, nor does it imply that the participants in the dialogue are incomplete or lacking in any way, but rather that they can develop and

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<sup>20</sup> The last chapter of the book is titled, ironically, "Against Writing." Nikulin selects this title because when we lose the interruptible voice, dialogue is lost and it becomes uninterruptible and finalizable dialectic.

change continually – either on their own or as a result of the dialogue. This makes dialogue engaging and interesting.<sup>21</sup>

Nikulin’s final component of dialogue is what he calls allosensus or other-sensus. He points out that dialogue among independent, free persons will involve disagreement and constant questioning. Among these free, independent participants, while there may be points of agreement, there will never be a full agreement. Dialogue not only allows, but is integrally about the recognition of difference of and from the other. Nikulin contrasts allosensus with dissensus and consensus. In dissensus there is a sense of antagonistic conflict that can disrupt expression and communication. Consensus “ignores the insurmountable conflict of personal exchange” (p78) and if achieved (or enforced) ends the dialogue. Also, consensus often implies a compromise, where the contents of the compromise do not fully represent any of those reaching the compromise, unless there is some aspect of privilege or power that enables the consensus to be slanted one way or the other. Allosensus simply describes the natural situation of free, independent persons gathering to express their voice, without a need for conclusion – the different and changing persons will have differences. A key difference between consensus or dissensus and allosensus is a change from a focus on ideas to a focus on persons.

As I mentioned, the dialogic rhetorical space of engagement across faith and worldview difference I describe at the end of chapter four is informed by Nikulin’s components of dialogue. The engagement in dialogical rhetorical space is person-centered, not idea-centered. Because of the way that persons are valued, it is also a space where (ab)use of power is rejected, enabling the participants to engage freely and

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, Nikulin ends his book with a “(Dialectical) Conclusion”. His dialectic argues that dialogue is unfinalizable.

dialogically about both similarities and differences. Another key feature of these rhetorical spaces is that they are spaces of *allosensus* and unfinalizable dialogue. This kind of space both fosters mutual respect between participants, and encourages them to take differences (and similarities) seriously – creating a space that would be acceptable to sincere, serious believers from different faiths.

### **Rhetoric, Identity, and Community**

Finally, as has been alluded to above, the role of rhetoric in creating identity and community is huge. Kenneth Burke wrote extensively about rhetoric and identification, division, and community. Like Bitzer, Burke also wrote a piece (a book chapter) titled, “The Rhetorical Situation” (1973), which echoes and plays with his earlier work and suggests a rather different understanding of the “rhetorical situation.” Burke “ventures back to the roots” to find the universal (and origin-al) rhetorical situation. He writes about the “creation” of individual beings who, “through language and the ways of production, erect various communities of interests and insights, social communities varying in nature and scope. And out of the division and the community arises the ‘universal’ rhetorical situation.” (1973, p. 264 quoting his own *Rhetoric of Motives*) For Burke rhetoric is about “congregating” and “segregating,” establishing, building community – who is in, and, just as (if not more) important, who is out, who is “not us.” Burke (cynically) applies this to various political situations of his day. Burke suggests that successful rhetoric will involve a partial identification between the parties which will make them “substantially one”. He suggests that “[a] doctrine of *consubstantiality*, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life . . . and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (1969, p. 21 emphasis original). Burke also explores the darker side of

identification – “identification by antithesis, the most urgent form of congregation by segregation” which he sees at work in temporary wartime alliances and racism (1973, p. 268). One result of this can be a situation such that when anyone who raises an objection against one’s own group that is something the “other” might say, that person can be attacked as being on *their* side (Burke, 1973, p. 270) Shane Borrowman and Marcia Kmetz (2011) explore the rhetorical *values* of division as the flipside of Burke’s “*risks* of identifications” including the “risk [of] no real dialogue” when the critic (or questioner) is dismissed and not engaged. Patricia Roberts-Miller, in her article “Dissent As ‘Aid and Comfort to the Enemy’: The Rhetorical Power of Naïve Realism and Ingroup Identity”, draws on scholarship in social psychology which, she argues, fits with Burke’s emphasis on identification and division, and “provides a richer and more productive way to think about the real experience of public persuasion than does our own (too heavy) reliance on traditional explanations of expertise and authority.” (Roberts-Miller, 2009, p. 172) She argues that, “for many, public deliberation is about group identity” and that the power of this model “comes from the promise that the world is a stable place, and that all one really needs to know is the very easy to know fact of whether an interlocutor is an ingroup member.” (p. 185)

Burke’s, Borrowman and Kmetz’s, and Roberts-Miller’s pieces use political examples to show quite starkly and realistically how rhetoric functions to establish identity, build community, and reinforce division – and how this can happen coercively and/or without thoughtful consideration or deliberation. Borrowman and Kmetz offer the example of Jeanette Rankin, the only Congressperson to vote against the United States’ entry into World War II. She was prevented from asking questions and pressured to

change her vote. The passing of the resolution to take our country to war took only eighteen minutes. Rankin explained her dissenting vote,

Before we entered the last World War, four days were consumed in debating all phases of the issue before the vote was taken. Every argument used today was the same as in the last war, except this time the speed was so great that it prevented any answer or question. Had the vote to go to war been unanimous, it would have been a totalitarian vote, one not in keeping with our American way of life.

(Borrowman & Kmetz, 2011, p. 287)

Thus, she was voting not so much against the war (though she was a pacifist), but against the way that the resolution was (not) handled. Borrowman and Kmetz conclude that “we should acknowledge the need for rhetoric to serve less as a source of straight identification and more as a source of dialogue, a tool used to open the discussions that will naturally follow acknowledged divisification.” (2011, p. 289)

Often, rhetoric functions in a similar way in interactions about faith or worldview difference in largely homogeneous religious or worldview groups – and there is a similar need to acknowledge the value of and support a dialogic rhetoric across difference. C.S. Lewis was the first sponsor of the Socratic Club at Oxford University where intellectual questions about religion, especially Christianity, were discussed by religious and non-religious people. In explaining the need for the club, Lewis explained the

danger that those who think alike should gravitate together into coterie where they will henceforth encounter opposition only in the emasculated form of rumour that the outsiders say thus and thus. The absent are easily refuted, complacent dogmatism thrives, and differences of opinion are embittered by group hostility.

Each group hears not the best, but the worst, that the other groups can say.

(“Socratic Club,” 2015, “The Socratic Club,” 2005)

My construct of rhetorical space functions to describe both kinds of spaces – homogeneous and diverse (ecotonal) rhetorical spaces, as well as suggesting characteristics of dialogic rhetorical spaces. Trying to bring together people from different communities (whether political or religious) to engage across significant difference in peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous ways can work against many traditional and typical (and political) uses of rhetoric for identity community, and division, but is essential to pursue. When discussing rhetorical stance, I will suggest “ways of facing” the other that can facilitate this kind of engagement.

### **Conclusion**

In the next chapter I will explore student attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith or worldview difference. In chapters four and five I will explain my constructs of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance. These chapters will build on and extend the scholarship discussed in this chapter. The importance of holding the “gift of deconstruction” in tension with the challenge of (some form of) realism will be evident when discussing rhetorical stances that are both conducive to peaceful, respectful, generous engagement across difference *and* acceptable to sincere, serious, conservative believers. My construct of rhetorical space will build on the alternative (non-traditional) models of rhetoric that re-conceptualize it as relational, constitutive, collaborative, and ethical; as well as on the idea of rhetorical ecologies and ecotones and the value of tracing the complex, changing networks of relations and living processes of rhetorical discourse without containing or limiting or artificially dividing them, or imposing on them an “understanding.” My suggestions for dialogic rhetorical space build on

Nikulin's (2010) four components of dialogue. Finally, my constructs of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance take seriously the "congregation and segregation" functions as well as the dialogic potential of rhetoric in society.



### CHAPTER III

#### STUDENTS ENGAGING ACROSS FAITH AND WORLDVIEW IN THE CLASSROOM AND THE COMMUNITY: CLASSROOM RESEARCH

In this chapter I describe and discuss the classroom research which constitutes an integral part of my overall research for this dissertation. The student data were collected in three courses I taught during my PhD studies. These courses explored various kinds of interfaith interaction (from violent to peaceful) in today's world and encouraged students to develop peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous ways of engaging across faith and worldview difference. Gathering data in the university classroom provided a way to learn about students' attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference and to determine the effectiveness of my course design, which incorporated ideas from my previous research, reading, and experience.

In this chapter I will list the research questions for this study, describe the methodology and methods, and discuss the findings of the study. I will explore what this research suggests about students' attitudes and experiences, and about my course design which included elements of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance, constructs which I have developed and will discuss in the following two chapters.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions I developed for and explored in this classroom-based study are:

1. What are these university students' understandings of and attitudes toward contemporary relations and interactions between people of different faiths?
2. How do these university students report and feel about their own interactions about faith with others of different faiths?
3. (How) does exposure to and group discussion of various approaches to / examples of interfaith relations change students' interfaith interactions and attitudes?
4. (How) does being personally involved in interfaith interaction change students' interfaith interactions and attitudes?

### **Methodology and Methods**

The research I conducted for this project is broad, qualitative and exploratory. As I mentioned in chapter one, my goal was to gain a broad understanding of the rhetorics of engagement across faith and worldview difference. This classroom research complements my consideration of interfaith and inter-worldview interactions in the contexts and communities I am or have been part of, and in published materials that describe or constitute such interaction. Including classroom research contributes to data and method triangulation for the overall study. My other research is autoethnographic or textual. I consider my own changing personal attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference. I report my observation of the attitudes and experiences of others in faith groups and interfaith activities I have participated in. I also analyze interfaith and inter-worldview interactions in published materials. This classroom research involved phenomenology and heuristic inquiry. As the teacher, I was integrally involved with the students as I observed their attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference – and the

ways these changed throughout the course. As I will explain in more detail below, I used content analysis of students' contributions and work, looking for emergent categories and connections in their expressed attitudes, experiences, and changes, while maintaining the continuity and context of their personal experiences over the semester (Ellen & Renner, 2003; Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 1990, 2014).

In my research, I value a dialogic tension. My initial "life-experience" research involved analysis and processing of my attitudes toward and experiences of interfaith interactions as they and after they happened, without reference to previous theory or research. Later, as I put this life-experience research in dialogue with rhetoric scholarship and research, I found both resonances and tensions that informed my continued research, including this classroom research. I cannot help but have formed ideas and theories about interactions across difference, but when "observing subjects," I also want to be listening to persons, seeing the ways their attitudes and experiences fit with and support my ideas, but also always ready to accept, even celebrate, when their stories don't fit and challenge my ideas. Joe's story of engagement (related later in this chapter) was a pleasant "surprise." A less pleasant surprise was a religious leader's negative reaction to my inquiry about my students visiting her next-to-campus place of worship for their Engaging Others semester project. The "conceptual framework" (Maxwell, 2012) of my research methodology includes much of what I related in chapter one about my values, my experiences, their connections to my research, and my dialogic critical realist philosophical orientation.

The student data gathered in this study have been and will be kept confidential. No names or identifying information are included in this dissertation. All (first) names

used in descriptions of students' writings or interactions are not their real names. IRB approval was obtained for the project.

### **Design of the Courses**

I was excited to teach these three courses for both pedagogical and research-related reasons. Pedagogically, teaching these courses gave me a chance to engage with students about interfaith interactions, which, as I have shown in chapters one and two, is a vitally important issue in today's world. As I communicated explicitly in my "Letter to Students" in each of the course syllabi, one of my main goals was to help students "become 'better', more aware, more thoughtful navigators of the religious / worldview / ideological diversity that is a reality in our communities and world."<sup>22</sup> The main focus of the courses was the Engaging Others semester project which culminated in students engaging across faith and worldview difference outside the classroom. I designed the course and the early stages of the Engaging Others Project to prepare students for these interactions. These activities and assignments included:<sup>23</sup>

- a faith or worldview autobiographical snapshot (or a faith or worldview journey "map"), in which students reflected and wrote about their current faith or worldview and the "life aspects" that formed and shaped their current beliefs and values
- reviewing and discussing these autobiographical pieces in small groups of classmates holding different faiths and worldviews

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<sup>22</sup> In Appendix A, I have included my "Letter to Students" from one of the courses. The "letter" was a key part of my syllabus and gives an overview of the course and a feel for the ethos of the course. The letter for each course was different, but the letter included is representative of the three.

<sup>23</sup> Each course was slightly different. Not all of these activities and assignments were included in each of the three courses.

- various reflections about their attitudes toward and experiences of interfaith or inter-worldview interactions
- reading or viewing (about) very diverse interactions across faith and worldview difference – from violent to peaceful – and discussing these
- based on the above readings and discussions, developing guidelines for engagement across faith and worldview difference
- planning, taking part in, and reporting on an interfaith or inter-worldview interaction outside the classroom (For example, students visited mosques, synagogues, temples, and churches. They coordinated small interfaith and inter-worldview discussion groups. They interviewed people in mixed faith families and people who had left a faith or converted to another faith.)

Also, teaching these classes gave me an opportunity to test and develop ideas based on previous research, reading, and experience. Some of these ideas I wanted to explore included:

- Was a “tolerance” attitude toward faith and worldview difference as prevalent among younger people as it appeared to me?
- Could a tolerance attitude toward faith and worldview difference be complicated and shown to be inadequate by reading and discussing extreme and obnoxious beliefs and interactions?
- Could this understanding of the inadequacy of tolerance be developed into some kind of an engagement approach by reading and discussing various examples of interfaith and inter-worldview engagement?

- Would a person-centered method of developing an engagement approach work well? (i.e. examples of specific people interacting, interacting with classmates who are different, actually doing some interfaith or inter-worldview interaction) What kind of guidelines for interfaith engagement could people develop after doing this?
- (What unexpected might happen? What might I learn from students or by observing students?)

These questions were the basis for the more open, neutral research questions listed previously.

### **Gathering and Analysis of Student Data**

The data gathered for this qualitative study consisted of the materials students produced in or for class; my observations of class and group discussions and conversations (in person or email) with students; course evaluations; and interviews of selected students. The materials students produced included their work produced for the activities and assignments listed in the previous section. I took notes and kept journals of my observations of class discussions and activities. I also occasionally took pictures of the whiteboards when I used them to record contributions to class discussions.

I will explain a bit more about the student evaluations. At mid-semester and at the end of the semester of each course, students were given anonymous course evaluations to complete.<sup>24</sup> The mid-semester evaluations (“Mid-Term Thoughts”) were

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<sup>24</sup> The end-of-semester supplemental course evaluation for one of the courses included a place for students to write their name and indicate if they were willing to be contacted after the semester to be interviewed about the course, thus this one course evaluation was not anonymous. However, like the other end-of-semester evaluations, I did not see the submitted evaluations until after grades were submitted. The responses on this set of evaluations was generally consistent with those from the other two classes and included some negative comments about the course. While I realize that this does not remove the possible

done online via Google Forms and were typically completed by about half of the students. (Being anonymous, they were effectively optional as I could not know who did or did not complete it.) I reviewed the mid-semester evaluations immediately in order to improve the remainder of the course. At the end of the semester, students were given anonymous supplemental paper-based course evaluations that they completed along with the required university Scantron bubble-sheet course evaluations. Almost all students completed these evaluations. These evaluations were held by the department office until after semester grades were submitted. The evaluations asked students to describe: what aspects of the course (so far) they appreciated and best supported and advanced their learning<sup>25</sup>; what aspects (so far) were not appreciated and did not support and advance their learning – and how the course could be improved; and what their most significant learnings in the course were (so far). I also asked students if I had been respectful and fair to all students, to all those whose material we covered in class, and to people of all faiths / worldviews. Overall, as would be expected, students wrote more text on the online (mid-semester) evaluations than on the paper-based (end-of-semester) evaluations. However, I was impressed with the amount of time, thought and attention students gave to the final evaluations. While a few students wrote minimal answers, most students wrote at least a line or two in response to the four questions of the final evaluation – and many wrote quite a bit more, with several filling the provided spaces with writing. The quality of their responses was, for almost all of them, very good – their comments made

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effects of including a place for the students' names, I did not look at names. I had someone else cut the names off of the forms and I stored them separately.

<sup>25</sup> I understand that this clause is asking about two different aspects of the course. I chose to link these two aspects for two reasons: to prompt students to write about both aspects; and as a pedagogical hint to encourage students to link appreciation and learning. Also, there was some variation in wording between the evaluations given in each course, but the summary here fairly represents them.

sense, fit with the course, and contained mostly reasonable compliments and critiques of the course.

My goal in including the different types of data in my research was to triangulate or confirm findings as much as possible. I included both student in-class writing which was more spontaneous, as well as out of class writing which was (or could be) more thought-through. I included both shorter, less formal homework writing and their longer final projects. I included students' writing where they were expressing their understandings and attitudes, *and* students' self-perception of their understandings and attitudes, *as well as* my observations of their interaction in the classroom. I felt it was very important to include students' anonymous reflections and comments in addition to their regular (non-anonymous) coursework. I also interviewed selected students (after their courses) who seemed particularly engaged during the course.

I analyzed the student data I gathered in two main time frames. First, as I taught each class – listening to class and group discussions, reading and grading student assignments, interacting with individual students and groups about their work, especially their Engaging Others Projects – I got to know the students and their attitudes toward and experiences of interfaith and inter-worldview interaction. I also noticed comments or writings that indicated changes in their understandings and attitudes. During the courses I took notes on these observations. Later, after the courses were finished, I reviewed the end-of-semester course evaluations and reviewed again the student writing and, while considering my observations and notes taken during the semester, I discovered five main themes or trends that were discussed or addressed repeatedly in student writing and



discussions. I then identified the student work that was most relevant to review again, specifically:

- Autobiographical writings (Snapshot, Map, Attitudes and Interactions Reflection)
- In class (individual and group) and homework writings about witnessing – both experiences of being witnessed to or witnessing, and recommendations for those who witness; and responses to the Maher (2008) article.
- Engaging Others Projects (Guidelines and Report)
- Course evaluations
- Tests

After further review of the student work, I combined first one pair of themes (witness and exclusive belief) and then another (changing attitudes and experiences) that I came to see as belonging together. The final set of themes are:

- Students' negative attitudes toward and experiences of witness and exclusive belief
- Students' changing attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference
- Value of person-centered engagement

I also reviewed the work of several students who had actively engaged in the course activities and project, selecting three of them to interview, but was only able to interview two of them. Both interviews further confirmed much that I had determined from my analysis of the data. However, each interview also raised my awareness of important aspects related to two of the themes. Rose, after talking at length about her learning in

the class, specifically her changed approach to faith or worldview difference, mentioned some of her classmates not “getting” what she took from the class. This prompted me to further explore students who did not seem to change much in their attitudes. (See the last paragraph of this section.) Lisa complicated the third theme. She described her experience as a Christian of actively engaging across difference with her closest friends (who are atheist, Muslim, and Jewish). Lisa also told me about one of the leaders in one of the Christian registered student organizations (RSOs) she used to attend who warned her about having such close friends that were not Christians and the effect that might have on her faith. Not everyone appreciates the value of person-centered engagement.<sup>26</sup>

When selecting excerpts of data and incorporating them in my discussion of the findings, I have used descriptions, paraphrases, and brief quotes to try to represent what students were writing or saying as clearly and fairly as possible. In most cases I have tried to represent the “average” or “typical” in the courses I taught. However, in some cases when I have reported longer stories about or quotes from students, I have used these to explore a phenomenon in more depth or to show what could happen. These excerpts from the data may not be “typical” in extent, but I would maintain are representative in nature. For example, most students did not experience the extent of change in understanding and attitude, or feel as conflicted as Joe did during his interaction with a very conservative Christian group. But most students experienced this to some extent.

Before moving on to describe the student-participants, I would like to make two additional notes about my analysis of the data. Most of the student data were gathered from course assignments and activities which, because of the sensitive nature of the

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<sup>26</sup> Information from Rose’s and Lisa’s interviews are included under the second and third subheadings (respectively) under Findings.

issues, were very open, allowing for students to share more or less explicitly about their attitudes toward and experiences of interaction across faith and worldview difference. There was a wide variety in how students interpreted or understood prompts or questions, and how (closely) they answered the questions or addressed the prompts. Also, students did not all use the same wording to describe similar phenomena. Thus, my findings are based to some degree on my interpretation and analysis of their writings and/or their interaction in class or directly with me. This often also renders clear statements of numbers or percentages difficult because, in many cases, the ideas or attitudes or interactions I refer to have not been (equally) addressed by all students in one or in all three courses from which I gathered data. In these cases, I have used general terms (e.g. a few, many, most) to convey my sense of the general prevalence of the phenomena being discussed. In other cases, where I was confident that I could compare one set of students with the whole, I have stated numbers and percentages. I do feel that both kinds of data are valuable and that, in some cases, further research could yield more exact comparisons.

Finally, I would like to mention that there were a small number of students who did not seem to seriously or actively engage in the course. I sensed their lack of participation in class – either verbally through minimal or no contributions to class discussions, or by a lack of thoughtful or insightful comments on homework writing (e.g. reading responses) or in-class writing (e.g. focused free writes). But I felt the key indicators were what and how they wrote in the Engaging Others Project documents and on the final test (in one course) near the end of the semester. I found that what they wrote for the project documents and on the test seemed not to be very different from what they

could have written at the beginning of the course, reflecting the uncomplicated “easy, safe tolerance” of diversity attitude that most students had entering the course. Additionally, they did not (adequately) reference or engage with any of the course readings or activities in their writings – which was clearly required. There were 15 students from all three classes (19%) that fit this description. While this is a somewhat artificial division, I felt that most of the other students showed more evidence of engaging with the course to a greater extent. I would like to clarify here that I am not expecting or demanding that students change their attitudes. I do expect all students to “do something” with the “complications” we review – to, if they maintain a tolerance attitude, show how it works interacting with those we read about – to show that they have thought about the challenges. There were many times in these courses when students disagreed with each other and with me about how to best interact across difference, for example in our discussions of syncretism.

### **Student Participants**

Each of the three classes started with 30 students and ended up with 24, 26, and 28 students regularly attending class for a total of 78 students in the three classes. Among the three classes four students did not give informed consent to be included in the study and data gathered from those students was not included in the study.

Given the nature of this study, it seems appropriate to report generally on what the students reported about their own faith or worldview. This information was provided by the students in reflective autobiographical assignments in the different courses. Almost all of the students came from some kind of Christian background. Many of these students were “lapsed” or “nominal” believers – they expressed that, while they might still “believe in God” and had not “rejected” their faith, currently their faith was not really a

significant part of their lives. Some reported that they there were parts of their faith growing up that they still accepted, but other aspects that they had rejected, and that they saw this as a legitimate, even preferred way of believing. Several students reported that they believed in God or a “higher power” but were not religious, and several seemed to fit the category of “spiritual but not religious.” Some others from Christian backgrounds had more actively decided that they were no longer Christians and had become generally nonreligious or more clearly identified as agnostic or atheist. There were several Christians who were still – or had become committed to and active in their faith, including some who reconnected with their faith after lapses when they would not have considered themselves (good) Christians. There were a few students who identified as Jewish. A small number of students had non-religious, very minimally religious, or mixed religious backgrounds and tended to stay “there”. A few students had explored various faiths and had adopted aspects of different faiths, including one who identified as “Christian Buddhist hybrid.”

In a similar course I taught more recently<sup>27</sup> I asked students anonymously (using PollEverywhere.com) how they self-identified with regard to their religion or worldview (see Table 1). The results from this class seemed to be similar to the previous classes I taught, except that this class seemed to be a bit more heavily Catholic.

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<sup>27</sup> I did obtain an IRB protocol for collection of student data and informed consent from the students for this course, but have not yet fully analyzed the student data collected.

Table 1		
<i>Students' Religious Identification</i>		
Self-identified as	Number	Percentage
Agnostic	1	4%
Atheist	2	8%
Catholic Christian	12	48%
Evangelical Christian	2	8%
Jewish	1	4%
Muslim	0	0%
Protestant Christian – not evangelical	7	28%
Other	0	0%

### Findings and Discussion

My findings from this classroom-based research could be summarized in one sentence: As a result of taking one of these courses, most students changed significantly in their attitudes toward and experiences of interaction across faith and worldview difference through person-centered engagement. The findings discussed below strongly suggest that most students became “‘better’, more aware, more thoughtful navigators of the religious / worldview / ideological diversity that is a reality in our communities and world,”<sup>28</sup> (better) able to engage peacefully, respectfully, genuinely, and generously across faith and worldview difference. This, as mentioned above, was a main goal of all three courses. The success of these courses offers support for the ideas on which the course plan, activities, and assignments were based – specifically my constructs of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance which were developed based on my previous research, reading, and experience and then further informed by this research.

The following discussion of the findings is organized around three main themes that emerged during my analysis of the data. First, I will discuss students’ negative attitudes toward and experiences of a specific, but very significant and common

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<sup>28</sup> From my “Letter to Students” (see Appendix A)

phenomenon of interfaith interaction – witness and exclusive belief. The second theme I explore is students’ changing attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference throughout the course. Third, I will discuss how the courses demonstrated the value of person-centered engagement in changing attitudes toward and experiences of interfaith and inter-worldview interaction.

### **Students’ Negative Attitudes toward and Experiences of Witness and Exclusive Belief**

One of the most noticeable specific themes that I noticed both while teaching these courses and while reviewing the student data was the overwhelming negative attitudes toward and experiences of witnessing (also referred to as evangelism or proselytizing) and the often accompanying implicit or explicit expression of exclusive belief. Students expressed these attitudes and related these experiences throughout each semester in writing and during class discussions. I will also describe below how many students were, by the end of the semester, able to explore these negative reactions and suggest ways that those who witness might do it “better.”

Witness (and exclusive belief) is an important theme to explore because of the various feelings, values, and rights surrounding it. Many committed, sincere people of faith in America (and globally) hold exclusive beliefs and witness for their faith (in various ways). In my observation of and experience with American evangelical Christians, many more of them feel they should witness, but don’t – and often feel guilty about it. (See my discussions of witness in chapters four and five.) Also, freedom of religion and freedom of speech are core American rights and values enshrined in the Constitution. These rights allow people to “witness” in public places – even in ways

considered obnoxious and offensive by most citizens.<sup>29</sup> However, much, if not most, witnessing takes place in private conversations between family, friends, or acquaintances.

Yet, based on my students' reports of their experiences and attitudes related to interfaith interactions, witness and exclusive belief are the aspects of interfaith interactions to which they react most negatively. Several students mentioned this topic in the first written piece in one of the courses, the Attitudes and Interactions Reflection, which was assigned for the first day of class. It also was a significant topic of writing and discussion when we discussed Maher's (2008) Washington Post article, "A Priest Walks into Qatar..." early in the semester in all three courses. In this article, Maher, a Catholic priest, describes his two years in Qatar teaching first year theology to mostly Arab Muslim students preparing for careers in international affairs at an extension campus of Georgetown University. He makes the argument that many in the West (especially academics) do not "get" the powerful claim that religion has on the imagination of many in the world today. He starts his article with a particularly stark example of exclusive belief: "Would I [Maher], one of my students had asked a classmate, be going to hell? The class held its breath; I pretended to focus on erasing the board. After what felt like an eternity, the other student replied, 'Yes.' And then, 'Sorry, Father.'" (Maher 2008) The topic came up in other discussions throughout the semesters, not always linked to readings related to the topic.

In both their writing and discussion, many students made negative statements about witness, mostly with reference to Christian witness. Several generally did not like or were offended by people "pushing" their faith. One wrote, "I constantly feel as if I am

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<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding my students' negative attitudes toward and experiences of witness, they generally agreed that people had the right to witness, even obnoxiously.



being witnessed to. Christians to me seem the most adamant and aggressive with their religion and in my opinion tend to push their views onto others.” Another mentioned that his Catholic friends had told him he was going to hell because he was not Catholic. Students made negative references to “Brother Jed” or other “preachers”, who occasionally visit the university quad and preach a very condemning message to passing students. A couple students mentioned “pushy” atheist friends, one Christian wrote that his atheist friend “is very pushy about his views and tries to make it a point to compare God to such things as the Easter Bunny and Santa.” One student, who identified as a “peaceful atheist” seemed to be aware of this, writing that “atheism comes off as harsh and stubborn”. A couple of students reported an uncomfortable (ab)use of emotions by people, mainly family, witnessing to them. They were told by the person witnessing (and clearly holding exclusive beliefs) that he or she “pitied” them, or “felt sorry” for them because they did not believe, or “wished” that they would believe. Students reported responding to these moves by being silent in future interactions so as to avoid any conversation which might be related to issues of faith.

However, some others, while responding negatively, recognized (at least potential) different ways of believers witnessing. One wrote,

It makes me feel very awkward; not really for myself, but for the man screaming holding a sign. I understand that you have been saved and it’s great, but maybe find a less obnoxious way of telling people? People who scream out bible verses, at least in my opinion are hurting the spread of their religion more than they are helping it.

A Christian student explained why people don't want to talk about faith with Christians: "Poor examples of screaming preachers, overly devout Catholics criticizing gays/abortions, etc. have painted an inaccurate picture of the true message of Christianity." Others reported conversations about faith with peers which varied from calm to intense, but were not characterized as negatively.

A few Christian students mentioned in their writing their own experience witnessing to others. One told about his witness as a camp counselor to campers. Another wrote, "As for my specific faith, I have witnessed to multiple people. Sometimes it doesn't go well and the person completely shuts down, but other times they truly listen to me and decide that they want more." One witnessed to international students who worked with her and who "asked lots of questions" about her faith.

Many students also expressed negative feelings about people having strongly held, exclusive beliefs, both people's beliefs that their faith is right and others are wrong, and that they are going to heaven and others are going to hell. This was seen by several as the "problem" with religion. Conversely, there was broad appreciation for non-judgmental openness in matters of belief. One student wrote, "I do have a hard time with organized religion, but I respect each religion and would never judge a religion/faith simply because I don't believe in it." Similarly, another wrote, "I don't think that Christianity has any greater claim to accuracy than any other world religion or system of beliefs. That is perhaps why I have difficulty functioning as a dedicated member of one organized religion—the fact that they so often condemn the others."

I would also like to mention discussions about witness which took place late in the semester in a couple of the courses. In these class discussions we explored why

witness (and exclusive belief) bothers us so much. Students mentioned being bothered by a “join our student religious organization” blitz during the first weeks of the fall semester. Students commented, “They’re everywhere.” and “They make me feel guilty.” and “It’s overwhelming.” Students saw these people as impersonal and not responsive, simply wanting to build numbers for their organization. One student, in partial defense of these activities, likened it to political canvassing which can also be overwhelming. Some commented that they saw the faith that people were inviting them to as “anti-intellectual”, “blind following”, and not allowing questions. Others noticed in those who witnessed aggressiveness, a superiority complex, a judgmental attitude, and unwillingness to listen.

I also asked students to suggest advice for those who witness for their faith.

During a class discussion students suggested that people witnessing make sure that they are offering, e.g. asking “Do you want to talk about this?” Students also suggested that it is better if people “witness” to those with whom they already have a relationship or a way to relate to them. Students recommended that people witnessing have interest in others beyond “faith” and that they welcome questions. In another setting, students in small groups entered their suggestions into a shared Google document. Their recommendations included:

- “Two-sided sharing: giving the other individual(s) an opportunity to be honest and express their current beliefs or hesitations and LISTEN”
- “Express your own concerns about your faith and religion”
- “We [those witnessing] should know about their faith before assuming things that they believe that might not be true.”

- “Use terms that pass the ‘stranger’ test: Would a stranger of your religion be able to understand what you are trying to explain?”
- “Take the target audience into account so you can be respectful and still try to get your point across”
- “Knowing who your audience is can help determine HOW you are conveying your message.”
- “Being able to step back and do some self-reflection can also be key in determining how you are engaging others. If you were standing there watching yourself speak about your faith and views, what would you like to see?”

In these discussions, I felt the students overall were (better) able to critically explore and analyze their feelings, and were also (better) able to make constructive suggestions. Even though many (still) had problems with witnessing, they saw the problem, at least partially and potentially, as due to *how* the witness was done, as opposed to witness itself being all of the problem or necessarily problematic. One student, in his Engaging Others report, distinguished acceptable and non-acceptable sharing of faith by using different words, “testifying” and “witness” that, for him, carried these meanings. I see the last set of recommendations above as particularly good examples of students understanding and recommending engagement, with the first three bullets emphasizing the “back and forth” or two-way-ness of engagement and the last three bullets emphasizing the value of understanding the others and taking an appropriate stance when engaging them.

Near the end of the semester, these students were able to describe ways to make engagement (specifically aspects of what I call rhetorical space and rhetorical stance in chapters four and five) more dialogic. These students creatively applied some of what they had learned over the course of the semester – even to an activity that really bugs them. Interestingly, this demonstrates not only the students’ understanding of how aspects of rhetorical space and stance affect interactions, it also suggests they have the ability to advise and encourage others toward more peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous interaction.

### **Students’ Evolving Attitudes toward and Experiences of Engagement across Faith and Worldview Difference**

In this section I report on the main theme I found in the classroom data. As a result of taking one of these courses, most students’ attitudes toward and experiences of engagement across faith and worldview difference evolved significantly. I use the concept “evolution” because what happened was more than a simple change in their attitudes or experiences – there was a fundamental change in the way most students thought about and approached engaging across faith and worldview difference. By the end of the course, most students’ attitudes toward these interactions had moved (to varying degrees) from what I would call an attitude of “easy, safe tolerance” of diversity to an attitude of appreciation of difference and complexity and an interest in engaging about and across difference. Also, almost all students reported having a positive experience of interaction across faith or worldview difference (which was part of the semester project). For many students, this was the first or most substantial interfaith or inter-worldview interaction they had experienced.

**Easy, safe tolerance.** At or near the beginning of each semester, I found that almost all students had an attitude of “easy, safe tolerance” of diversity. While the word tolerance was explicitly mentioned only a few times, the concept was represented in various ways. Most students, but not all, mentioned one or more of the following concepts. Students said that people “should not talk about religion,” that “religion should be kept private” or that people should keep their faith to themselves and not push it. Students also held that with regard to religion, people should be open-minded, unbiased, and should not be judgmental. Students expressed that people should respect difference, but also that there are not any “truly significant differences between any of the main religions in our country.” A few students expressed valuing uncertainty and questioning with regard to religious beliefs. Most students clearly valued tolerance over any kind of violence or coercion against differing beliefs, but also viewed avoidance of interaction or a shallow interaction which avoided any “judgment” as the way to achieve this tolerance. Students’ comments about witness and exclusive belief (see above) also reflect this value.

A few students evidenced, but did not explicitly state a more exclusivist attitude. Unlike the above students, these students expressed their strong and firm beliefs clearly and in a way that implied that they considered other beliefs wrong. One student wrote, “I am convinced that I should not live my life following any other religion or belief system besides the Catholic faith because I know that it is the way to happiness, truth and the most fulfilling way of life.”

A few students at the beginning of the course (who had, prior to the course, experienced interaction across faith or worldview difference) expressed an understanding

that differences could and should be identified and talked about in order to come to a better understanding of the other. One student wrote,

One of my best friends is Muslim and we have had many talks about our respective religions. Sometimes it's just to clarify why we don't do something, or a question is asked due to interest. We are great friends so the difference in faith doesn't cause strife or anger it just allows us to think and truly give the other person the chance to say what they need to say.

**Variety of previous experiences of interactions.** I found that students came from different backgrounds which afforded different levels of opportunity to engage across faith and worldview difference. First, many students reported that prior to coming to university they had very little or no opportunity for engagement across difference. They had grown up in smaller towns or communities where there was not a lot of obvious faith or worldview diversity. These students described places where Christianity was the cultural norm and “everyone” was a Christian. Some mentioned the existence of one or two churches in their small town that most people were associated with.

The nature of these environments and the Christian privilege that many of my students grew up with is illustrated by a story and its setting related by one student about her high school. Nancy<sup>30</sup> wrote this story in an assigned response to a set of readings which were assigned a little less than half way through the semester. The readings (Eck, n.d.; Sam & Berry, 2010; Shady & Larson, 2010) explored different ways people respond to faith and worldview (and cultural) diversity. My prompt for the response asked students to choose one of the responses to diversity and describe an example of this

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<sup>30</sup> As mentioned above, all (first) names used in descriptions of students' writings or interactions are not their real names.

response that they had experienced or heard about. Nancy described her hometown as “[not having] a stoplight anywhere, [and having] only one gas station, and only one family owned and over-priced grocery store.” She continued her description of her hometown, “As I got older, I started to see my town for other characteristics it possessed: a small farm town, predominantly white, and, as one can guess, overwhelmingly Christian. All throughout my life, everyone I knew belonged to a church and went every Sunday.” Nancy was involved with a club in her high school that was linked to a national Christian organization that supports Christian students’ fellowship and ministry in their high schools, colleges, and universities. She was very active in this club’s activities, including being involved in “movie nights, bible studies, prayer groups, and meetings every Friday morning.” In her junior and senior year she was a leader in the club.

The setting for Nancy’s story was fairly commonly reported by students – growing up in communities where there was little or no visible opportunity for engagement across faith or worldview difference. Nancy’s story, though, reveals an atmosphere of Christian privilege and resistance to the possibility of interaction across worldview difference that was less commonly explicitly reported by students, but seems to have been part of at least some of their environments, based on more general comments, especially some of the students’ comments related to their attitudes toward and experiences of witnessing and exclusive belief. I will let Nancy tell her story in her own words:

When our [club’s] instructor called all the leaders into his office one day, he told us that there was a new club forming in our school. It was called SSA, and it stood for the Secular Student Alliance. It was a group of students who would



come together weekly to talk about not just not having a faith or anything to believe in, but they would explore different religions and beliefs and question them or back up theories with science. Obviously, this was kind of shocking to all of us because nothing like this had ever happened before. No one had ever NOT expressed their faith, let alone claim they were atheist. [The club's] instructor told us that we had to do all we could to not let students continue to join this group, because "it wasn't right."

Nancy reported having a strong negative reaction to this teacher's expression of Christian privilege and resistance to inter-worldview engagement. The rest of her response seemed to include a blending of her feelings at the time and her reflection on the experience in light of the readings I had assigned. Again, here is Nancy in her own words:

Obviously, my instructor was wrong. Our country is growing away from older values and I believe that living in a small little town kind of prevents this from happening. I thought about it, and I realized that who am I to tell people what is or isn't right? Who isn't able to explore different religions or beliefs? Why can't people of different backgrounds be able to be friends let alone be able to stay in the same classroom together? He made it out to seem like that because they believed differently than he did, that they had some sort of disease. Nothing is wrong with diversifying our culture and expanding our horizons.

My teacher, with his wrong and ignorant opinion, made me open my views. He helped me to understand the concept of pluralism. Of course, no one is going to have all of the same beliefs or views on religion or anything for that matter, but why does that stop us from seeing them as equals? Eck used a great

example with the table metaphor- not everyone at the table will agree, but pluralism involves the commitment to be at the table, even knowing the other's beliefs. My teacher had no room to judge other people without having any slight knowledge of their beliefs, how the students were raised, or why they chose to believe what they did. Being tolerant and respectful is all a part of pluralism. Living in a multi-religious country, where every single person is free to believe whatever he or she wishes, everyone needs to be conscious and aware that not every person will share their beliefs, but that does not make them any less of a person. I wish I could express this to my teacher and make him see that this *is* the future.

Nancy's response reflects her holding and processing of both the idea of tolerance and not judging, e.g. "who am I to tell people what is or isn't right?", as well as the idea of pluralism as active engagement across difference (as defined by Eck (n.d.) in one of the assigned readings), e.g. "pluralism involves the commitment to be at the table, even knowing the other's beliefs." Nancy also sees tolerance and respect as a part of pluralism. Nancy's attitude of tolerance even though coming from a relatively non-diverse environment without much opportunity for engagement across difference (i.e. where it was such an unusual occurrence) is typical of many students.

There was a second smaller group of students who reported growing up in more diverse communities (often in or around a major city), but without much interaction. Growing up in a more culturally and religiously diverse community did not automatically result in more interaction across faith and worldview difference. These students were, in some ways, more aware of diverse faiths and worldviews. Yet some of these students,

along with some students in the first group reported that coming to university was the first time that they had interacted (or had the chance to interact) across difference. Others in these groups reported that their Engaging Others Project was the first time they had significantly interacted across faith and worldview difference. One student who attended a fairly diverse high school told about sitting with friends of other faiths at lunch every day in the cafeteria but never talking deeply about faith. The friends knew what certain friends would not eat or when they were celebrating a holiday, but that was the extent of their interfaith interactions – it was just accepted that “their family was like that”.

A third, even smaller group of students reported interfaith and inter-worldview interactions among their friends, classmates, or families; or as a part of organized interfaith interaction. A few students reported having an interfaith family, in most cases having parents who held different faiths or worldviews, reporting mostly civil interaction (but sometimes tension) in the family and an appreciation for the perspectives this situation gave them. Most of this group of students had interactions with classmates and friends of other faiths or worldviews. Some in this group reported that this interaction and learning about different beliefs and worldviews, especially among their peers, caused them to question the faith they grew up with and engage in spiritual searching. One student reported having taken part in formal interfaith interaction. His youth pastor arranged for the students in his confirmation class to visit other places of worship and hear from other faith leaders. This student reported this as being a first step of his journey to agnosticism from Christianity. Another student reported that exposure in college to religious friends made her “wish [she] grew up with more religion.” She also

explained that she is now trying to become more involved in and educated about Christianity.

**Appreciation of difference and complexity and interest in genuine engagement.** As I mentioned above, most students' attitudes toward and experiences of interaction across faith and worldview difference changed over the course of the semester. They moved from an attitude of "easy, safe tolerance" of diversity to an attitude of appreciation of difference and complexity and an interest in engaging about difference. I saw these changes throughout the semester, for example in Nancy's response discussed above. I also saw changes through comments students made to class discussions – or how they made their comments. One key example of this was students, realizing how their faith informed and shaped their views, starting their comment to the class with their faith identification, for example, "Well, I'm a Catholic, and the way I see this issue is..." But these changes were more clearly expressed in students' Engaging Others Project reports, in their comments on end-of-semester course evaluations, and in the comments of a student I interviewed.

On the course evaluations (completed by 71 of 78 total students), there were two learnings which were mentioned most often by students in response to an open-ended prompt asking them to describe the "most significant learnings they are taking away from the course." The learning most mentioned by students (mentioned by 41%) revolved around the idea of learning the importance and complexity of religion, faith, and differences between faiths. Two students expressed the importance of this learning, writing, "Never before did I engage in such serious subject in a college course" and "I learned ... I really needed to open my eyes to notice what a big part of society religion

really is.” Recognizing some of the complexity and diversity among and within religions, a student wrote that s/he learned that, “everyone interprets religion in different ways [and] some people strongly support and will advocate for their religion while others are reserved.” One student reported learning how to disagree but not offend. A student, recognizing the importance of seeking to understand even difference that is offensive, wrote concisely that s/he learned to accept that “even radicals follow a logic train.” Another student wrote, “I was very interested in the different reasoning behind why people decide to turn to violence.”

For the second most reported learning, 35% of students reported about learning how to engage across faith and worldview difference in respectful and dialogic ways. One student wrote, “I am taking away concepts and better knowledge about how to interact across faith and worldview difference, successfully.” Another learned to “respect other people’s views and listen to how they see it and not assume.” Recognizing the hard work, a student reported learning that, “Engagement is not easy and takes a certain mindset and a willingness to learn from people.” Students also reported learnings that highlighted that they were part of the process. One wrote, “I learned to really be proud of what you are and not to be afraid to show it or talk about it.” Another student learned that “seeing the different worldviews of others, and challenging our beliefs was fantastic.” And a student wrote, “I learned more about my faith through other faith differences.”

Two other learnings reported by multiple students were related to the above most mentioned learnings. Students reported learning about other religions (17%) and learning about their own faith through the interactions with others (8%).

These learnings represent significant changes from when the students entered the course. These comments report a move from an “easy, safe tolerance” to difficult and complicated engagement. As one student put it, “I learned that interacting across faiths is indeed a heavy and concentrated task.” Another student concisely summed it up, “Engagement, not just tolerance.”

Another way some students demonstrated their growing appreciation of difference and complexity when engaging across faith difference was in their comments in a discussion following watching excerpts of the film “Paradise Now” about Said and Khaled, two Palestinian Muslims who are good friends and are recruited to become suicide bombers in Israel. Many students demonstrated the ability to seek to understand from inside of the others’ worldview, but still disagree and condemn. While some students saw Said and Khaled as following their religion, others pointed out how Jamal, their handler, was “using” religion to encourage them as they went on their suicide mission. Another student pointed out the different interpretations of the same passages that support this kind of violence or don’t. Others pointed out that much more was involved in the situation that motivates suicide bombers than religion, including the huge inequality in power.

Students also demonstrated how their attitudes toward and experience of interacting across difference changed in their reports of their Engaging Others Projects. Most students mentioned the difficulty of the project, how it challenged them, *and* their appreciation for the value of engaging difference. One student, Kate, commented on some surprising difficulty in her interaction, “Going out and ‘doing’ is harder than it may seem.” “[I see] my meetings with [the others] more as lessons than interfaith dialogue.”

Although she self-described as being raised Christian, but “unsure” and “open-minded”, she was surprised to find herself offended by some things the others said about Christianity. Kate wrote, “I was even a little uncomfortable because it made me question whether or not religion means as little to me as I think it does.” Reflecting her desire to both be respectful and engage difference – and the difficulty of striking the right balance, Kate wished, after the interaction, that she “had been a little more willing to challenge some of the things said to me by ...” She also commented, “It is difficult to waive the crippling fear of offending others. It is also very difficult to tread upon what someone sees as sacred.” Kate also mentioned that she “felt lucky” to do this and (earlier in her paper) described the experience as exciting and enlightening. She finished her report with advice for others engaging across faith difference: “I would advise them first and foremost to be a learner and a listener. ... People who speak without truly understanding their other usually create deeper conflict.”

Students in their Engaging Others project faced specific, embodied reality of faith / worldview in persons. What they found did not always match with their previous thoughts or their neat boxes. Students seemed willing to allow what they found to change their minds and break their boxes. Some students came away from their Engaging Others interactions with mixed, conflicted feelings. One student found the group he visited to be more open to variety in doctrine than he had expected. He also, based on his interaction, changed his understanding of why they evangelize. I will relate more of this student’s interaction in the next section as it shows these changes coming about through person-centered interaction.

I spoke with a former student, Rose, about the course she took almost six months after the course ended. She reported that through the course her understanding of interacting with others changed. Tolerance, she said, was not wrong but had “faults.” She explained, “I can’t just say ‘OK,’ I need to seek to understand, but also get them to understand me.” She reported that she used to think it was wrong to say, “I’m right and you’re wrong,” but now she thinks it is “OK to challenge others” and “get them to consider other options” if she follows a “good process.” Rose mentioned several guidelines for these interactions:

- reciprocity – “not being one sided, inviting them to challenge me” and “making sure all are heard *before* finding common ground or anyone making any changes” (her emphasis)
- humility – not having a “superior attitude,” recognizing “I don’t know everything” and having “more desire to know more about them than desire to change them”
- no fear – “not being afraid of ‘their’ beliefs” because “fear leads to negative interaction”

Rose’s guidelines are similar to some of the recommendations I will make about rhetorical space and rhetorical stance in chapters four and five. Rose’s “reciprocity” relates to my recommendation that rhetorical space be person-centered and a space of equality without abuse of power – so all can be heard. It also resonates with my discussion of a generous rhetorical stance that invites the other to build their image in my mind. Humility is a key part of a respectful rhetorical stance. I emphasize the importance of an epistemically and experientially humble stance and explore potential



issues and solutions related to the stances of some conservative religious people who have a certainty-orientation toward their faith. Fear of the other is common and in some ways, as Rose suggests, needs to be addressed before engagement across difference. But there are also ways that dialogue-conducive rhetorical spaces and stances can alleviate fear in participants.

Rose also explained that she thought some of her classmates in the course did not “get” this because they are “not able to fully immerse themselves in the other’s view – to step outside of themselves and understand the other and then ‘come back’ [better able to] discuss, think, and respond.” She explained that they “cannot make this separation,” so “skip this step without giving it a chance.” It makes sense that Rose focused on this because in her final project, she did just this, researching a rude, obnoxious Christian preacher that visits various university campuses, including Rose’s. She also explored students’ reactions to him. By “immersing herself in his view,” she was able to discover the “logic” of his, she discovered, *consciously* chosen way of (inter)acting. As a result she concluded her project with recommendations of how to (not) interact with him that may have a better chance of success in getting him to stop visiting the campus.

### **Value of Person-Centered Engagement**

The third theme I found or confirmed in my classroom research is the demonstrated value of person-centered engagement in changing attitudes toward and experiences of interfaith and inter-worldview interaction. This is a phenomenon that I have noticed previously in my experience of engaging and encouraging engagement across faith and worldview difference – and informed my design of the course, especially the Engaging Others Project, which will be a main focus of this section. But first, I want to explore other ways this theme was supported by the data I collected.

The value of person-centered engagement was reflected in student comments on the end-of-semester evaluations about what aspects of the course best and least supported learning. The most mentioned aspects that best supported learning were class and group discussions, the Engaging Others Project, and the religious leader guest speakers (who spoke in only one of the courses). The most mentioned aspect that least supported learning were the readings, especially the “longer,” “difficult” readings, i.e. the more academic articles I assigned. Related to the readings, I found that the readings which included a personal story generated more robust and engaged classroom discussion. While I want to be careful not to draw too much from young college students preference for short, story-based readings (and videos – mentioned by a few students) over longer academic articles, I did notice that the class activities and assignments that involved personal interaction of some kind were most appreciated and most engaged in by students.

Another person-centered aspect of the courses was how I coordinated and taught the courses. It was important to me that I model the kind of respectful, person-honoring interaction we were exploring and I was expecting them to do in class and for their project. I was pleased, that the end-of-semester evaluation question asking students if I had been “respectful and fair to all students and to those whose work and ideas we read and discussed” was answered affirmatively by all students in all three classes, except for three students who answered negatively, didn’t answer, or offered a mixed answer. One student wrote that I “made the classroom an environment where all students felt comfortable to share.” Another student wrote, “As an atheist going into this class, I figured I would feel uncomfortable, but I never did.”

The personal interaction across faith or worldview difference that was part of the Engaging Others Project was, in many ways, the ultimate learning activity AND the ultimate test of whether the learning throughout the semester “clicked”. Most students reported positive experiences as they interacted with persons of a different faith / worldview for the semester projects. Even the few students who reported negative or awkward parts of their experiences that they had to work through (e.g. participants in dialogue starting to get upset, or having trouble getting started interacting). For some students this was the first time they had interacted at this level with someone having different beliefs – and a few students feared the project. The positive aspect of the project was not just that they enjoyed it, which most students did, but that they learned about and came to better understand *people* (not a group or an ideology) who were different from them. Students, although finding the project challenging, also expressed appreciation and mentioned that they feel better prepared now to engage with others of different faith / worldview in the future.

One student, Beth, wrote earlier in the semester clearly about growing up in a Methodist church and her decision in her junior year of high school to “commit [her] life to Christ” as “one of the best decisions [she has] made” and one that “has significantly changed [her] life.” She also wrote, “I am excited to take this class is because I hope to learn about different religions and their personal views because I have not had much interaction with people of a different religion than myself.” Later, when writing some first thoughts about the Engaging Others Project, Beth mentioned that this would be the *first* time she had engaged with someone of a different faith and that this was causing her “some fear”. She wrote, “What I am most concerned for is not knowing enough

information to stand up for myself or back myself up if the opportunity arises.” Beth ended up having some intra-faith conversations with a Catholic family she knew and visiting a Catholic Mass with them.<sup>31</sup> In her report, Beth explained that she learned a lot about Catholicism. She also wrote about her experience at the mass:

I was very surprised to feel accepted when I went to visit the Catholic mass.

When it was time to take communion I knew that I would not be allowed to have any since I wasn’t Catholic so I thought I would just sit in the pew and wait for [her friend’s family] to come back when they were done. Instead [her friend’s mother] told me that I needed to go up with them and instead of taking communion the priest would just bless me. This was something that really moved me because I have no ties to the Catholic Church, I had only come this one time so the priest does not even know my name and yet he still blessed me.

I believe that the person-centered nature of this intra-faith interaction between Beth and her friend’s family and the unknown-to-Beth priest gave Beth comfort and confidence to be able continue to engage in other intra-faith and interfaith ways in the future.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the value of person-centered engagement is the Engaging Others Project done by Joe. Joe is Catholic and he decided to do his Engaging Others project with a very conservative Protestant church located in a small town in central Illinois. He had met a couple from that church at his sales job when they were buying a large quantity of supplies for a mission project of their church. Joe was somewhat aware of their church affiliation due to their distinctive dress and knew that

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<sup>31</sup> I usually encourage students to interact across different faiths, though occasionally I will approve intra-faith interactions. Some conservative Protestant Christian students and even a few Catholic Christian students refer to “Christians” and “Catholics” as two different religious groups. When this comes up in a class, I usually give a brief church history lesson about the Great Schism and the Protestant Reformation.

they were pretty conservative. He asked them about visiting their church for this project and they heartily welcomed him. They welcomed him when he came to the church and the man acted as his guide, introducing Joe to others and finding men who were willing to have a discussion with him. (The church practices segregated worship with men worshipping on one side of the sanctuary and women on the other. They are also “circumspect” about how unrelated men and women mix.) The couple also invited Joe to come for breakfast.

As Joe thought about this interaction, he “assumed that as Christians there would be enough overlap.” However, this was not the case. During the services Joe attended, he was disturbed by the condemning, “hell fire and brimstone” preaching. When he had discussions with some of the men of the church, the topic of homosexuality (which they strongly condemn) came up – which Joe had hoped would not as he identifies as homosexual. There were many ways that Joe disagreed with this church and the people, and ways that he felt like a “foreigner”. While they witnessed to him and clearly would have liked him to believe like them, Joe was certain he could never agree with their beliefs. But through Joe’s personal interaction with his host and three other men from the church, Joe also saw their love for him – and saw that their attitude toward him was not hate, but love – and that this is why they wanted him to convert. Seeing this changed his attitude toward them. He still disagreed with them and was glad to be a Catholic, and, in fact, came to “cherish” his own faith more as a result of this interaction. Yet this church and these people no longer fit in the hate-filled, Christian bigot box he had put them in. Joe wrote,

I finally realized how much I had learned about not only [this religious group] but about myself. I had serious misconceptions about them being a condemning religion. I had failed to recognize that their form of love was still love, despite how much it differed from my version. I had failed to recognize how my tolerance of their views was not tolerance, but mere apathy towards it. I am still not fully tolerant of many of their views. I do not appreciate how the women were treated in the church, but they choose to that live that way therefore who am I to judge? That is probably the biggest difference I have noticed in the way I look at people since concluding this project. I cannot simply judge someone by what they say, but truly by what rests in their hearts. That is what matters most. Although it is easy to confuse the image of what is in their hearts, at the end of the day, it tends to be love.

Another student's intensive engagement across faith and worldview difference in peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous ways also demonstrates the value of person-centered engagement as a way of learning, growing, and changing. But her story also shows how this kind of engagement can be resisted and seen as dangerous by some. Lisa was one of the students in my classes who had been actively engaging across faith and worldview difference prior to attending my class, and she has continued to do this since taking my class. Lisa, who identifies as a Christian, discussed with me her interactions with three close friends who identify as Muslim, Jewish, and atheist, as well as her interactions with other Christians about these relationships. Lisa has talked with all three of these close friends about faith, but some of the most intensive interactions about faith and worldview have been with her atheist friend, Cindy. Lisa explained that her

conversations with Cindy can be uncomfortable because there are a lot of differences between them and they are honest about these differences. They mutually challenge each other about their beliefs and understandings. Lisa admitted that she is not always able to answer Cindy's questions and that they provoke continued thought. When I asked how this relationship works, Lisa offered a few valuable observations. Both Lisa and Cindy are able to lean into the discomfort and accept the challenges because of the safety of their friendship. They each see the other as inviting and open, not as threatening. They both really want to better understand each other. Lisa related that Cindy had gone with her to a meeting of a Christian registered student organization (RSO) on campus in order to better understand this part her faith life. Lisa appreciated that Cindy did this even though Cindy was raised as a Christian and had felt disowned by Christians due to her rejection of the faith and her identifying as a lesbian.

Lisa also reported some struggles in her interaction and relating with some of the leaders and others in the Christian RSO mentioned above. Lisa was bothered by the way this Christian RSO did ministry, especially their active recruiting of students to join the organization, although she admitted that all RSOs can get over-aggressive in recruiting. Lisa eventually stopped regularly attending their meetings, although she still stayed in touch with some members. Some leaders in this organization also seemed to disapprove of her close friendships with these friends that were not Christians and the way that she related with them. One student leader suggested that these friendships were potentially dangerous, and possibly keeping Lisa from a closer relationship with Jesus.<sup>32</sup> He told her

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<sup>32</sup> I saw another example of a cautious attitude that resisted engagement across faith difference when I was contacting religious leaders to find places of worship near campus that my students could visit for their Engaging Others Project. Almost all leaders were welcoming, but leadership of one major faith center adjacent to campus did not want me to suggest their place of worship as an option for students. It seemed

that she should “guard her heart.” Lisa explained having mixed feelings about his warnings. On one hand, she saw that in some ways these friendships pulled her away from a “formal relationship” with the organization or from what she calls “religion,” yet she also felt that she still had a vital, “personal relationship” with Jesus, even though these interactions contributed to it being “rocky” and struggling. Lisa also reported that, while leaders of this organization said it was OK to talk about struggles, she did not feel comfortable doing this. She felt she could be more honest about her struggles with her faith with Cindy than with friends or leaders involved in this Christian RSO. Lisa also described the above mentioned student leader as being a philosophy major, having done a lot of good thinking about faith, and being aware of questions and issues related to his faith, yet having a more defensive stance with regard to his faith than she did. It seems that this is a key difference with Lisa’s stance, which was more open, more engaging about faith than defending the faith, and more dialogic.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this classroom research suggest that it was successful from both a pedagogical and a research perspective. As a teacher I see these courses as successful in accomplishing my main goal of helping students “become ‘better’, more aware, more thoughtful navigators of the religious / worldview / ideological diversity that is a reality in our communities and world.” I see evidence that most students now have understandings, attitudes, skills, and experiences that will help them to more confidently engage across faith and worldview difference in peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous ways. It is gratifying to see students both engage across at least some faith

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that the main reason was that they did not want students of other faiths or worldviews asking questions or making comments in meetings when student participants of their own faith were present.



difference for the first time, like Beth, and continue robust and active – and difficult – engagement that they started long ago, like Lisa. I would also note that a course like this with an Engaging Others Project may provide an occasion for people to engage across faith and worldview difference that would not normally exist. Most students, even if they thought this kind of interaction was a good idea, would not initiate it themselves – a course like this can provide a push or reason to make it happen.

The course was also beneficial in the wider world. A student I have not yet mentioned, Ann, did her Engaging Others Project with a sorority sister who is Jewish. In addition to learning about Judaism and visiting a synagogue and a Hillel (Jewish student organization) get-together with her, Ann listened to her sorority sister and discovered that she “felt uncomfortable in some instances because she did not feel as though anyone in [their] chapter was open enough to other faiths.” During our course, Ann talked to her sorority president about the situation. They made some immediate changes and started to pursue others with the goal of becoming “more welcoming to other religions,” including a discussion of “how to change parts of the process of becoming a member to be either less religiously centered on only Christianity, or less religiously centered in general.” Ann’s goal was to push for these changes in and beyond their local chapter of their sorority.

The findings of this classroom research also suggest that it was successful from a research perspective. First, the findings suggested answers to the research questions about students’ attitudes toward and experiences of interactions across faith and worldview difference. The findings suggest that an attitude of tolerance of diversity is common among these students although they come from places of quite varied levels of

faith and worldview diversity. Prior to attending my courses, most of these students had not experienced substantial interfaith or inter-worldview interaction. Second, the pedagogical and practical success of the course offers support for my course design which incorporated ideas from my previous research, reading, and experience. Specifically my course design included elements of two constructs I have developed, rhetorical space and rhetorical stance (which I will discuss in the following two chapters), which the students seemed to grasp and put into practice. In the Engaging Others Projects, almost all of my students were able to adopt a rhetorical stance appropriate for the rhetorical space in which they interacted. Also, several of my students were able, as evidenced by their comments and recommendations about witnessing, to sense that in certain rhetorical spaces (the non-religious spaces where witnessing was happening) people were taking inappropriate rhetorical stances which made others annoyed at them. My students recommended aspects of more appropriate rhetorical stances for those rhetorical spaces.

While the findings suggest that my course design was effective in encouraging a person with an attitude of tolerance of faith and worldview diversity to move toward an attitude of appreciation of difference and complexity and an interest in engaging about difference, the findings cannot address the question of encouraging a more conservative believer with an exclusivist approach to interfaith interactions toward this attitude of appreciation. This is because there were too few participants with exclusivist approaches in my courses. But I think some of the data might indicate that the situation with these students is more complicated, at least with respect to Christians. I think Nancy's story about the "intolerant" leader of the Christian student organization (and other data not

explicitly reported here) may suggest that there are variations of “exclusivist” belief in younger people that are more compatible with “tolerance” and “engagement.” In possible support of this, I have noticed in books, blogs, and sermons, laments from multiple conservative Christian leaders and organizations that “young people” are moving away from belief in “absolute truth” and a “biblical worldview” toward “relativism” and “postmodernism.” This may indicate that, in spite of the teachings and warnings of older conservative leaders, younger sincere, serious Christians are more able and willing to learn to engage across faith difference.

CHAPTER IV

RHETORICAL SPACE: CREATING SPACE FOR DIALOGIC  
ENGAGEMENT ACROSS DIFFERENCE

In this chapter and the next chapter, based on a synthesis of my interfaith experiences, relevant readings, and analysis of classroom data, I introduce, discuss, and illustrate two constructs I have developed to explore and analyze interaction across and about faith and worldview difference: *rhetorical space* and *rhetorical stance*. In addition to this “descriptive” use of these two constructs, I use these two constructs “prescriptively” to frame recommendations designed to facilitate engagement that is (more) peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous. In chapter six, I also offer an “engagement facilitation toolbox” which consists of a set of ten “tools” – practical ideas or activities – that can be used in classrooms or interpersonal contexts to encourage this kind of engagement. These tools are based on my recommendations for dialogue-conducive rhetorical spaces and rhetorical stances.

**The Construct of Rhetorical Space**

As I mentioned in chapter two, my construct of rhetorical space resonates with Edbauer’s rhetorical ecologies. Like Edbauer’s rhetorical ecologies, rhetorical space is the complex, changing, interconnected networks of relations and living processes of a set of (or sets of) rhetorical interactions, without containing or limiting or artificially

dividing them, or potentially imposing on them an “understanding” (e.g. as “rhetorical situation” does with its goal-focused orientation).<sup>33</sup>

I also mentioned in chapter two that my exploration of the rhetorical space of interactions across faith and worldview difference extends Edbauer’s concept of rhetorical ecologies by adding the concept of rhetorical ecotones. Ecotones are transition areas where two ecosystems or communities meet and integrate (“Ecotone,” 2015). In nature, ecotones can be sharp and clear boundaries or they can be more gradual transitions between communities. Much of the time the ecotonal area has greater biodiversity, but sometimes the transition can be detrimental to populations. As I pointed out in chapter one, rhetorical ecotones of interaction across faith or worldview difference have similar multivalent potentials – for sharp boundaries with very little significant interaction; for violent, even deadly, clash and conflict; for shallow or superficial “tolerance”; or for peaceful, enriching, beautiful growth and development.

Edbauer and I are both trying to “get at” the same thing – the best understanding we can obtain of the complex, interrelated rhetorical environment. We are also going about it in similar ways. However, there are two main differences. One is that, with rhetorical space or rhetorical ecotones, I start with a set of (or sets of) interactions that are of interest – interactions about or across faith or worldview difference. The second difference is that rhetorical space or rhetorical ecotones can be used both descriptively, to better understand these interactions about or across faith and worldview difference, and prescriptively, to recommend characteristics of rhetorical space or rhetorical ecotones

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<sup>33</sup> The concept of “rhetorical space” has been used by others (e.g. Code, 1995; Marback, 2004; Mountford, 2001; Topinka, 2012; Wright, 2005) to explore the role or effect of “space” as (a part of) rhetoric by exploring the “locations” of political arguments, Robben Island, four very different pulpits in fiction, the layout of city streets, and cemeteries, respectively. My usage of this term includes this sense (see question #4 below), but not as the primary focus of the term.

that facilitate more peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement about or across difference.

In chapter two, I offered an analogy of a biologist using various tools and techniques to discover the complexities of an ecotone. When exploring rhetorical space or rhetorical ecotones, the starting point is the set(s) of interactions that are of interest. The next step is to trace the connections that are in that environment – what and who affects and is affected by these interactions; what contributes to a better, fuller understanding of these interactions, the participants, and the broader rhetorical ecologies of which they (the interactions and the participants) are part; and, specifically, what helps the researcher(s) and the participants figure out why certain (sets of) interactions are more peaceful, respectful, generous, and/or genuine – and others are more violent, disrespectful, uncharitable, and / or just for show.

### **Five Questions for Exploring Rhetorical Space**

I propose the following five heuristic questions as useful for exploring rhetorical spaces and rhetorical ecotones of engagement across faith and worldview difference:

1. Where are the (sets of) interactions in which we are interested taking place and what is the nature of this place?
2. What is the character and extent of faith and worldview difference among the individuals and groups interacting?
3. What are the social distances, cultural differences, and power relations among the individuals and groups interacting?
4. What in the environment or context has a bearing on the interactions, participants, and/or relationships?

5. How are the individuals and/or groups in this space actually interacting across or about faith and worldview difference?

**Where are the interactions taking place?** First, we need to ask where the (sets of) interactions in which we are interested, are taking place, and what is the nature of that place. The “place” may be a physical place (e.g. a classroom, a mosque, a home, etc.) or a virtual place (e.g. an online chat room, a discussion board, a phone call or conference call, etc.).<sup>34</sup> It may also be that the interactions we are interested in are a part or aspect of culture-wide or even global conversations among larger groups or their representatives. To learn about the nature of the place, we may explore: Who (gathers and) interacts here? Why do they (gather and) interact in this place? How regularly do people interact here? Are those interacting the same people or different people? Perhaps the most important question we need to explore is how and to what extent interactions are regulated, guided, or shaped in this place. Explicit guidelines or rules are easy to find. Other non-explicit ways that interactions can be shaped can be harder to figure out, but it is important to explore these other ways of shaping. There may be informal and reasonable ways of shaping interaction that are known and accepted by most participants; there may be ways that interactions are shaped that are beyond the control of the participants; or there may be hidden, hegemonic, controlling ways of shaping and disciplining interaction that oppress participants in some way that they are unaware of – or even see as “good” or “common sense”. Some of the following questions can be useful in finding and analyzing these non-explicit ways of shaping and disciplining interactions.

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<sup>34</sup> It is, unfortunately, common for engagement across faith or worldview (or other) difference in virtual “places” to *not* be peaceful, respectful, or generous. I suggest that one reason for this is the potential and actual anonymity and the lack of face-to-face interaction and person-to-person connection of much interaction in virtual rhetorical space. I discuss these aspects of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance later in this chapter and in chapter five.

**What is the extent and character of faith and worldview difference?** Second, we need to ask what is the extent and character of faith and worldview difference among the individuals and groups interacting in this place. While including the extent and character of faith and worldview difference is integral to this project, I would argue that it is important for any kind of interaction across difference. Faith and worldview are often integral parts of identity, community, and culture.

My reason for specifying extent *and* character is that “feelings” about faith and worldview difference (character of difference) are not always apparently correlated with degree of similarity (extent of difference). Often relatively minor differences in the eyes of “outsiders” can elicit very strong feelings among “insiders” – and vice versa. Some religious or theological controversies between members of the same religion can be very intense. There are multiple, tragic historical examples of these strong feelings about difference turning into violence, for example the religious wars in Europe following the Reformation. Not only was there violent and deadly conflict between Catholic and Protestant Christians, there was also conflict between Protestants as they divided into different groups because of doctrinal differences.<sup>35</sup> Today, disagreements between evangelical protestant Christians about origins, eschatology (end times), and other theological issues can become quite heated, in spite of the great amount of similarity in the beliefs that they share. Similar disagreements and conflicts have been and are a part of the intra-faith interactions of other religions as well.

Of course, strong verbal and violent conflict has been common across significant faith and worldview difference throughout history and continues today. Historically,

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<sup>35</sup> Of course, there was more to this historical, violent conflict than theology, including politics, economics, etc.



early Muslim expansion, the Crusades, and Communism's treatment of religious people in the 1900's have all been characterized this way. Today Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, and even Buddhist individuals and groups engage in strong verbal and sometimes violent conflict across faith and worldview difference. These conflicts, including the "culture wars" in America, have triggered many calls for comity and civility.

Finally, there are situations where interaction across significant difference in faith or worldview does not trigger heated or violent interactions, e.g. many interfaith organizations bring together people of different faiths for interfaith dialogues, or to do community service together and talk about how that relates to their faith. It is important that the extent and character of faith and worldview difference – be accurately described. It is an aspect of rhetorical space that is significantly related to the concept of rhetorical stance which I will explain in the next chapter.

**What are the social distances, cultural differences, and power relations?** The third question that needs to be explored is, "What are the social distances, cultural differences, and power relations among the individuals and groups interacting?" These are, as with any human communication, very relevant to interaction across faith and worldview difference. Generally speaking, lower social distances, fewer cultural differences, and more equality in power relations among participants can facilitate more peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous interactions. However, often these aspects correlate with faith or worldview difference, so that engagement across faith or worldview difference is also engagement across social distance, cultural difference, and power inequality. For example, in some Middle Eastern countries indigenous Christian

minority communities tend to be wealthier than Muslim majority communities, yet these Christian communities can also be viewed and treated negatively by many in the Muslim communities, and can face political obstacles and opposition to practicing their faith. Also, in many cases, ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa are identified with a religion due to historical and societal reasons. This interplay can also be the case between intra-faith groups. In Lebanon, Shiite Muslims are generally of lower socio-economic status than Sunni Muslims.

I recently was part of a small group of white and African-American pastors and Christian leaders who met regularly to discuss race relations. Listening to the perspectives and experiences of my African-American Christian brothers and sister, I was reminded of and able to see in a new, more personal way how white privilege has made the white and black Christian experience in America different. It is important to be aware of and explore these relevant factors and their interplay.

#### **What in the environment or context has a bearing on the interactions?**

Fourth, we should ask what in the environment or context has a bearing on the interactions, participants, and/or relationships. These aspects of the environment or context could be natural, cultural, historical, temporal, economic, or political. There can be some overlap between the third and fourth questions, but the focus of each is different. The third question focuses on current interpersonal or intergroup relationships. This fourth question focuses on current and historical aspects of the environment or context that can affect the interactions (and/or the relationships). Including these environmental or contextual aspects can make the analysis more complicated, but they also make the analysis more accurate. Because interactions across faith or worldview difference can be

affected by environmental or contextual reasons that, in themselves, have little or nothing to do with faith or worldview, I will include a few examples.

“Encounter Point” (Avni & Bacha, 2007), a documentary about Palestinian and Israeli families who have lost loved ones to the conflict yet come together to advocate for peace, includes an attempted meeting between Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. The Jewish Israelis were not able to get to the meeting place inside the occupied West Bank due to an unexpectedly and suddenly closed border crossing. While they were eventually able to get there hours and many frustrating cell phone calls later via another crossing, many of the Palestinians who had gathered and had food ready earlier had left – to the disappointment of the Israelis who had done so much to reach the meeting place. Already precarious interactions were further shaken by this environmental factor.

The Interfaith in Action student organization at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign regularly gathers students of different faiths to do community service projects together. These events include discussions where participants share about how their faith commitments inform their service. They have found that if they schedule these discussions after they do the service together, students often leave before the discussions, so they are exploring different ways of planning these events that make these discussions more likely to happen.

An article and response in the collection, *Peace-Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburger (2009), demonstrate how global context has effects on local interactions between Muslims and Christians. Abdul Rashied Omar (2009), in his chapter, “The Right to Religious Conversion: Between Apostasy and Proselytization”, and Asma

Afsaruddin (2009), in her response to Omar's chapter, discuss two contentious global issues. One issue is apostasy in Islam, the practice (or threat) of killing a Muslim who converts from Islam. The other issue is "aid evangelism" (using the distribution of humanitarian aid to evangelize for one's faith), especially when carried out by evangelical Christians among Muslims – and especially in war-ravaged countries. (Omar acknowledges that both some Muslims and some Christians participate in aid-evangelism.). Omar gives examples of these issues, and discusses how Muslims and Christians talk about them – and shows their interconnectedness. Among other things, both Omar and Afsaruddin call for Muslims to rethink the issue of apostasy while taking into consideration Quranic passages and early Islamic scholars which they see as contradicting the idea of capital punishment for apostasy. However, they clearly realize the difficulty of Muslims doing this in the current global environment. Afsaruddin (2009) explains,

Such an educational enterprise in the contemporary period is by no means guaranteed success. If anything, present political circumstances militate against the possibility that most Muslims would be receptive to this kind of historical and hermeneutic exercise. Feeling besieged by a perceived hegemonic West and threatened by cultural globalization, a considerable number of Muslims today would consider revisiting the "apostasy" issue as a form of capitulation to secularists and to those Westerners who only seek, as may appear to them, the emasculation of Islam. Rashied is thus right to point out the significance of sociopolitical factors, which inordinately complicate Christian-Muslim encounters today. Constructive, respectful dialogue that takes into account these myriad,

complex issues may, however, by God's grace, lead us to a better way forward. (p 202)

Note that Afsaruddin both acknowledges how the present global context complicates interaction, *and* calls for interaction, specifically “constructive, respectful dialogue” that takes these complications and complexities into account, as a “better way forward” than ignoring them.

**How are the participants actually interacting?** Fifth and finally, we can explore how the individuals and/or groups in this space are actually interacting across or about faith and worldview difference. We may be able to place some interactions along various continuums, e.g. peaceful or violent, respectful or disrespectful, genuine or just for show, generous or not, willing to listen or not, ethical or unethical, goal-oriented or relational-oriented, explicit or implicit discussion about faith or worldview, focused on ideology or praxis, monologic or dialogic, power-balanced or imbalanced. But we also want to look at connections. The main point of this construct of rhetorical space is to help us understand the interactions as fully as possible in their complex and varied contexts – how the interactions are shaped by and shape these contexts.

Two extended examples at this point may clarify how the construct of rhetorical space can help us understand different kinds of interactions across or about faith or worldview difference in different places. Both of the examples below are drawn from my participant observation in different rhetorical spaces where interactions across and about faith and worldview difference were occurring. In the first example, I explore the relatively homogeneous rhetorical space of conservative evangelical protestant Christian churches where there is typically very little difference in the beliefs, faith, and

worldviews of the participants. Thus there is typically very little engagement *across* faith and worldview difference, but there often is some engagement *about* faith and worldview difference. For the second example I will explore the more ecotonal rhetorical space of student interfaith dialogue events where there is much more engagement across faith and worldview difference. For both examples, I will work through the five heuristic questions described above.

### **Understanding the (Homogeneous) Rhetorical Space of Conservative Evangelical Protestant Christian Churches**

People of sincere faith often attend regular religious meetings of various types at a house of worship, including worship services, prayer meetings, educational classes, and group studies of religious texts. In these meetings there can be interaction about and, generally, less frequently interaction across faith and worldview difference. There is a great deal of variation in how this interaction might take place across different religious places and in different kinds of meetings. For this example, using the five questions listed above, I will describe the typical interaction in the rhetorical space of several conservative evangelical protestant Christian churches I have observed and/or been part of.<sup>36</sup>

1. Where are the (sets of) interactions in which we are interested taking place and what is the nature of this place?

Most people who regularly attend conservative, evangelical churches attend the churches because they want to be involved in worship, prayer, study and learning about the Bible, and interaction or “fellowship” with others who hold very similar beliefs. The

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<sup>36</sup> These explorations provide some relevant background for the section on witness in chapter five. Also, for an extended (and somewhat different) exploration of the “rhetorical space” of similar, but generally more conservative fundamentalist churches, see Ward, Sr (2008).

large majority of people at most gatherings are those who are members or “regular attenders” of the church. While explicit guidelines about interactions are generally not present or at least not prominent, there are understood acceptable and unacceptable ways of interacting across and about faith difference – which will be developed below in response to the other questions.

2. What is the character and extent of faith and worldview difference among the individuals and groups interacting?

These churches tend to be (or at least appear) very homogeneous with regard to faith and beliefs. Conservative evangelical churches have doctrinal statements with which members are required to agree, and sometimes more detailed statements with which anyone in leadership is required to agree. Difference of belief on “peripheral doctrines” is allowed, but not with regard to doctrines in the statements – and sometimes other doctrines which are not listed in the statements. These doctrinal beliefs are usually strongly held and defended by leaders, and believed to be (simply derived from) the “clear meaning of scripture.” Most members accept the doctrines as taught along with the “evidence” that supports the doctrines. Often Christian education in these churches involves Bible studies where participants are asked to read selected passages of scripture that relate to a certain doctrine, belief, or practice – and are seen to support it. Passages that others would see as not supportive are not brought up or are explained away. In these cases, the leader would explain “what this passage is really saying” and show how this actually supports the doctrine or practice in question. The participants are often given handouts or booklets on this topic which contain leading questions where they fill in the blank or write a short answer and then, perhaps, write a longer answer about how

this doctrine “applies to their life.” Because of this style of teaching, and because certainty is valued and seen as essential and integral to faith, and doubt is seen as negative and contrary to faith, genuine discussion across difference rarely occurs – except sometimes on “minor issues”. Generally speaking, more conservative churches have longer and more detailed doctrinal statements. While a minority of these churches (the most conservative ones) would embrace the label “fundamentalist”, most would resist this label.<sup>37</sup>

3. What are the social distances, cultural differences, and power relations among the individuals and groups interacting?

With regard to this third question, the nature of these relationships among individuals and groups reflects the homogeneity of the beliefs. The participants are typically close socially, very homogeneous culturally, and rather homogeneous socio-economically and politically. With regard to power in the church, most participants respect and accept the authority of the exclusively male leadership to teach “correct” doctrine (and practice), make programming and financial decisions for the church, and to generally maintain control of the group, including the potential but rare exercise of “church discipline” against those whose beliefs or behavior are seen to be significantly counter what is accepted.

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, some of these churches on the less conservative side, have sought to re-image themselves as more open and even progressive in an attempt to appear hip and relevant to young singles and families, but often the changes made are superficial (e.g. more contemporary music, less formal services, serving more expensive coffee, hiring younger pastors with tattoos who wear skinny jeans, mildly swear on their blogs and casually talk about drinking craft beer, etc.) and the doctrinal statements, while perhaps not emphasized as much, do not change. A deeper, rhetoric-based exploration of this phenomena (How do conservative evangelical churches respond rhetorically to growingly diverse and pluralistic communities?) would be fascinating, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I have noticed a fair bit of conversation about this generally in the evangelical and ex-evangelical Christian blogospheres.



4. What in the environment or context has a bearing on the interactions, participants, and/or relationships?

In concert with the previous answers, these conservative evangelical churches seek to distinguish or isolate or protect themselves from many aspects of their environments or communities – seeing much of what is outside as often wrong (ideas such as evolution) and evil (practices such as extra-marital sex). Yet in other ways, they desire and work to be parts of their communities, genuinely wanting to reach out, do good, serve, and love others – a sort of one way interaction. A common (biblical) phrase summarizes this seemingly contradictory interaction – they are called to be “in the world, but not of the world.” Yet, the “world” does seep in. As noted in an earlier footnote, some of these churches try to (superficially) re-image themselves as more “relevant” to those in their community – in an effort to attract more “unchurched” (or “lost”) people to their gatherings. The changes they make often are picked up from the broader culture (dress, expressions and language, level of casual-ness, etc.) More foundationally, though usually not acknowledged or discussed, there are ways that theology and thought in these churches have been influenced by historic western culture and thought (including ancient Greek, pre-enlightenment, enlightenment, and, in some ways postmodern thought). The effects of this seepage is seen more in the way that thinking happens, not necessarily in the content of the thinking. One example of this would be the strong cognitive, propositional and “certainty” understandings of “faith” that are common in these churches.

Another change that has significant effect on these churches is the growing religious and worldview diversity in America and the growing appreciation of,

acceptance of, and granting of place, recognition, and rights to these diverse groups in the national cultural environment. Three such groups that are currently prominent in the American socio-cultural scene are Muslims, non-religious people, and the gay community. This growing acceptance of diversity has been accompanied by the reduction of the marginalization of some of these groups. This has necessarily resulted in a diminishing (in some ways) of the level of privilege historically enjoyed by Christians. While still enjoying substantial privilege, many Christians focus on and lament this loss of privilege in society (relative to what it was) and some, unfortunately, go so far as to see themselves as “oppressed” or to characterize this as “persecution.” This tends to create in these churches oppositional attitudes toward government, some groups that are now less marginalized, and organizations that work for equality. Language of “fighting for our rights,” working to “return America to its Christian roots,” “not compromising truth / our values,” etc. has become more common. This obviously creates further obstacles to evangelical Christians’ engagement with others inside or outside the church. There is a small minority in these churches, typically without much voice, that contests and opposes these attitudes, seeing them as inconsistent with their understanding of Christian principles.

5. How are the individuals and/or groups in this space actually interacting across or about faith and worldview difference?

Finally, while there is usually very little or no engagement across faith and worldview difference in these churches, there is often a fair bit of engagement about faith and worldview difference. The vast majority of this engagement is aimed at showing that their own beliefs are “right” and the others are “wrong”. This may involve leaders

“protecting” members from “dangerous” ideas or authors by not mentioning the ideas or authors (even when relevant) or by warning members about these ideas or authors. This may also involve presenting caricatures of the other’s ideas or arguments that can be easily defeated in their absence. It also often involves teaching members how to be sure of their faith and defend it against attacks by non-believers (apologetics). This kind of approach is often taken as well toward other Christians with whom the church (leadership) disagrees.

However, it is important to also point out that this strong and certain approach to their own and others’ beliefs (and practices) is coupled with teaching about, belief in the value of, and practice of loving one’s neighbor. While to the outsider, this seems odd or even impossible, I believe, based on years of participant observation, that most people in these churches really do sincerely love those with whom they disagree, believe are wrong, and believe are “going to hell.” Logically, then, for these conservative evangelicals, love for neighbor includes both maintaining a strong commitment to their own faith and “proclaiming the good news of the Gospel” to their neighbors, in the hope that their neighbors will join them in their faith. One implication of this way of thinking, is that “good” Christians / church members will “witness” to or “evangelize” their friends or neighbors, which may include inviting them to regular or special services at the church. When these “non-Christians” come to church events (which usually constitutes a minority of church events), the interaction is almost always peaceful (though some might employ or imply threats of eternal damnation), monologic, power-imbalanced, goal-oriented, idea (content of faith) focused, genuine in expression (on the Christians’ side) and explicitly about faith. In most cases, when leaders know that there are “unsaved”

people present, there is an urgency to make sure there is a “clear presentation of the Gospel” so that those visitors will know how to “get saved” (because “you never know when you might die” and then lose the chance to be “reconciled to God” and “go to heaven when you die”). While leaders and church-members are polite and generally “respectful” of visitors, there is often much less interest in listening to the visitors’ beliefs than in proclaiming the “Truth” to them.<sup>38</sup>

### **Understanding the Ecotonal Rhetorical Space of Student Interfaith Dialogue Events**

Students at most religiously-affiliated and non-religiously-affiliated universities and colleges are often involved in situations where they interact across faith and worldview difference. Most educators see these interactions as good and important parts of a liberal arts education that prepares students to work and serve in diverse local and global communities. Some of these interactions “just happen”, for example: students may find that they have roommates or housemates who identify with different faiths or worldviews than their own; in their classes, students may encounter ideas and values that significantly differ from the beliefs and values that are part of the faiths or worldviews they grew up with; and students may encounter, while walking across the quad, public activism or evangelism by groups or individuals that challenges their faiths or worldviews. Other interfaith and inter-worldview interactions are sought out. Students may choose to take classes on religion or philosophy specifically to learn about other faiths or worldviews. Interested students may also join or participate in the activities of registered student organizations that focus on interfaith (and inter-worldview) dialogue

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<sup>38</sup> I want to emphasize that while my description represents an “average” of my observations, there is a lot of variety of interactions in the conservative, evangelical churches I have observed (and others). Also, as I mentioned earlier, there are currently spirited discussions among evangelical Christians about how to “be” and engage in a pluralistic world. Some scholars who track the Christian evangelical movement, for example, Roger Olson (2011), see the movement as having already split into more conservative and more progressive branches.

and service. For this second example, I will describe the typical interactions in the ecotonal rhetorical space of student interfaith and inter-worldview events I was involved in on a University campus in the Middle East where I taught from 2007 to 2010. I will focus on the events that were sponsored by the Interfaith Dialogue Student Club (a registered student organization) of which I was the faculty advisor, but I will also reference other interfaith and inter-worldview dialogue events that I organized related to the courses I taught, and that were sponsored by the Free Thought Society, a student organization associated with the Philosophy Department. I will again proceed through the five questions I proposed above to explore the relevant features of rhetorical space.

1. Where are the (sets of) interactions in which we are interested taking place and what is the nature of this place?

The interfaith events sponsored by the Interfaith Dialogue Student Club took place on the university campus and were open to all members of the university community. Students who were involved in the leadership and members of the club were the majority of students that came to events. Most students who were involved were sincere believers in their own faith and saw this as a chance to interact genuinely about faith with others in a peaceful, respectful way. A significant number of these students also saw these interactions as a way to witness for their faith. The interfaith events that I organized related to the courses I taught were different in that my students were expected to attend, but many students expressed interest as this was something that had not happened on campus previously. These events included guest speakers, question and answer times, guided group discussions, and media pieces with discussion. The events and interactions were conducted in line with an explicit set of guidelines that I developed

in conjunction with some students who were involved in setting up the Interfaith Dialogue Student Club (see Appendix B). This set of guidelines included three sections: a rationale explaining why we were involved in interfaith dialogue; a section that explained how we understood and practiced interfaith dialogue; and a list of ideas for interfaith activities.

2. What is the character and extent of faith and worldview difference among the individuals and groups interacting?

The majority of participants in these events identified as Muslims or Christians. Thus, there were clear differences in their beliefs and worldviews. Also, most of the participants saw these differences as significant – that Muslims and Christians each had strongly held, core beliefs that were contradictory and incompatible with the core beliefs of the others, e.g. that Mohammed was the last prophet of God, or that Jesus was/is divine and the Son of God. However, there was also a minority of the participants who identified as Muslim or Christian, but who viewed these “differences” in a more relativistic way, and thus would view them as having less significance.

3. What are the social distances, cultural differences, and power relations among the individuals and groups interacting?

The participants were almost all students at the university. While they reflected the cultural and social divisions in the country (see question four below), many of them were friends or classmates outside of these interfaith events. There was a basic, shared congeniality among all participants. During interfaith events, organizers sought balance among Muslims and Christians, e.g. in the make up of discussion groups, among student speakers and discussion leaders, and among invited speakers (whom we also tried to

“match” in educational level, leadership level, etc.). Organizationally the club was committed to having Muslim and Christian students represented in the club leadership (but without specific requirements). As the faculty advisor for the club, I tried, unsuccessfully, to find a Muslim faculty member who would be willing to be a co-advisor for the club. I also, while acknowledging my unavoidable position of power as faculty advisor, sought by what I did and did not say and do, to encourage the student leaders to run their own club. The goal here was to create, as much as possible, a rhetorical space of equal power among the different faith groups, so that neither group was marginalized or privileged. Also, I wanted to exercise (and model the exercising of) any power one did have in responsible and ethical ways.

One other point about these relational aspects among (potential) participants should be noted. One suggestion I did make to the student leaders of the club was that they reach out to the members and leadership of the Free Thought Society, most (but not all) of whom identified as non-religious, atheist, or agnostic. The student leaders pointed out that all students were invited to events, but they were generally not interested in offering any special invitation to the Free Thought Society leaders or members. The student leaders’ reticence had to do with some of the differences they (and I) noticed between the rhetorical spaces (and rhetorical stances) of the Interfaith Dialogue Club and the Free Thought Society. The Free Thought Society’s events were very debate oriented, for example at one event they debated whether faith was compatible with reason – with arguments for “yes” and for “no.” Some students of sincere faith seemed not to be comfortable with the way they interacted with others. The Free Thought Society advertised itself as a “non-prophet organization” which, while a clever and accurate pun,

was a clear statement against revelatory religions, especially Islam and the central place it gives to the prophet Mohammed. Non-religious students did not attend the interfaith events in any significant numbers.

4. What in the environment or context has a bearing on the interactions, participants, and/or relationships?

In this particular rhetorical space, the role of context (especially historical and geographical context) was huge. The country where this university was located had experienced a long, devastating, and deadly civil war that pitted political factions / militias (which largely identified with certain religious sects) against each other. While most students were born near the end or after this civil war, the memories and some artifacts (ruins) of it were still very much present. Following the war, the political and economic situation continued to reinforce difference among political factions / religious sects. In fact, during my time at that university, there were several days of actual battles between political (/religious) militias – including in the neighborhoods around the university. It was reported that some of our university students actually joined in the fighting on different sides. It was not uncommon for my students' free writings and occasionally essays to include mention of the civil war and the (then) current tense situation – through their own eyes or their parents' and relatives' eyes who had experienced it first-hand.

For these reasons, the university administration was very strict in forbidding any political or religious organizations on campus. Religiously / politically minded students, however, worked around this by creating “social” clubs which everyone knew represented various factions or sects. (The Interfaith Dialogue Club was the first club on



campus in recent history which was explicitly religious.) The administration was also very careful in handling student elections, because they became proxy elections reflecting and even unofficially funded by outside political factions.<sup>39</sup> The university was largely successful in maintaining calm social interactions in the university community. This was good and, in many ways, conducive for learning. In some ways it was only a veneer, but in other ways it provided a context for at least some students to interact with and get to know students from other groups to some degree.

5. How are the individuals and/or groups in this space actually interacting across or about faith and worldview difference?

Finally, the actual interactions in this complex rhetorical space across faith and worldview difference went surprisingly well. I think one of the key reasons interactions went well was that the guidelines, the student leaders, and guest speakers stipulated and modeled interaction that took difference seriously. Students from different faiths did not come together to *just* find commonalities and be cordial with each other, although that did happen and that was a good starting point, but they also were able to be together and interact as persons with sincere and significant differences in beliefs and practices. There were no finalized “solutions”, but there was peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous, face-to-face interaction across difference for many of the students attending these events.

### **Understanding Rhetorical Spaces**

At the beginning of this chapter, I explained that rhetorical space (and rhetorical stance) were constructs that could help produce a better, fuller understanding of interactions across faith and worldview difference, and could provide a framework for

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<sup>39</sup> One year one of the student candidates prominently featured in his campaign ads around campus that he was *not* connected to and funded by an outside political group. He was not elected.

recommendations to facilitate more peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous interactions. While I will more fully explore how these constructs together can produce better understanding than other approaches in the concluding chapter; I want to briefly do this here for the construct of rhetorical space.

There are three significant and beneficial aspects of the construct of rhetorical space demonstrated in the above explorations of a rhetorical space and a rhetorical ecotone. First, by making the starting point the interactions themselves and tracing the connections, relationships and networks in that space, we have a better chance that we will be able to discover relevant aspects or information related to the interactions. Second, by explicitly exploring the worldviews and worldview differences among the participants in the interactions, we increase the likelihood of gaining a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the interactions across and about difference – what is valued by different participants, why, and how this might affect the interactions. Third, by exploring the broader rhetorical ecologies or ecotones of which the selected interactions are a part, we again make it more likely that we will find ways that the broader context informs the interactions.

For example, as I explored the rhetorical space of the interfaith interactions at student interfaith events, I was able to discover different and mixed personal exigencies that motivated different students involvement in the interfaith interactions, namely, desire or need to understand others, or to witness for one's faith, or both, or "just coming with a friend", or even "just to get free food." These exigencies and motivations as well as the interactions themselves were informed by the students' faiths and worldviews, which were in turn informed by the larger context of the country's civil war and political-

religious strife often via tragic stories passed on to these children by their parents who participated in or were seriously affected by the civil war. Similarly, the exploration of the rhetorical space of conservative evangelical Christian churches builds a better understanding of why these Christians interact across and about faith difference in the ways that they do at church. Also, understanding interactions in this rhetorical space which are a core and valued part of most evangelical Christians' lives, contributes to a better understanding of how this space and these interactions inform and shape these evangelical Christians' lives and interactions in other rhetorical spaces, some of which will be explored in the next chapter. Put briefly, a key advantage of a rhetorical space approach is that relevant aspects of interactions across difference are less likely to be missed.

In addition to the three benefits of rhetorical space explained above, there are two ways in which an understanding of rhetorical space is needed to develop and adopt a rhetorical stance (which will be explained in the next chapter). First, a participant's adoption of an appropriate rhetorical stance requires an understanding of the rhetorical space where she will be interacting. Second, the role of faith or worldview in the rhetorical space of interactions across difference leads to the importance of maintaining a distinction between worldview as a "way of seeing" and rhetorical stance as a "way of facing" the other.

### **Dialogic Rhetorical Spaces**

Before moving on to a discussion of rhetorical stance, I want to mention a few recommendations for shaping (ecotonal) rhetorical space. Specifically, based on my observation and participation in the above student interfaith interactions, my classroom research, my participation in other interfaith events, and my analysis of reported interfaith

interaction, I have found that certain rhetorical spaces facilitate interactions that are more likely to be peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous; and have the best potential to result in “moments of meeting” between participants. The characteristics of dialogic rhetorical space listed below are also informed by Nikulin’s (2010) four components of dialogue discussed in chapter two.

First, dialogic rhetorical spaces are spaces of face to face, personal contact with the other. These spaces are person-centered and person-focused, not idea-centered or idea-focused. While conversations about ideas, beliefs, and practices happen, these ideas, beliefs, and practices are grounded in, connected to, embodied in, and lived out by the persons talking with and listening to each other. Persons are *not* just idea-carriers. The persons interacting find both commonality and difference between them. This valuing of persons entails a rejection of (ab)use of power, either coercively or hegemonically. Because power is not abused, participants can freely, without threat or fear, explore these commonalities and differences with the others. Moreover, this creates an atmosphere where participants can feel freer to consider minor – or even major – changes in their beliefs.

These spaces can, thus, become spaces of “allosensus” (Nikulin, 2010) or “other-sensus” – spaces where diverse persons with diverse ideas and beliefs can be together and interact. When the focus is on ideas or beliefs there can be pressure toward consensus, which finalizes by persons giving up some belief or idea they value; or toward dissensus which finalizes by separating and isolating the different beliefs or idea. But in rhetorical space which is centered and focused on persons the engagement can continue and the dialogue is never finalized, in part because the persons involved continue to change –

including change prompted by engagement with the other. While dialogue is not finalized, “progress” can be realized in better understanding, mutual empathy, deeper friendship, etc. Also, practical agreements and arrangements may be made, e.g. for service or activism together; and individuals may make life-changing discoveries or commitments in this context.

This is not to say that it is easy to engage across difference with others in these rhetorical spaces. But it can happen. As I reported in chapter three with regard to my classroom research, I provided my students chances for them to observe and enter dialogic rhetorical spaces where they engaged in these ways with people of different faiths and worldviews. For the final project they had the chance to create their own dialogic rhetorical spaces in which they engaged across difference. One of my main findings was that most of my students moved from an easy, safe tolerance-oriented interaction to dialogue-oriented engagement which was characterized by willingness to engage in the above ways with diverse others, including those with whom they strongly disagreed.

Dialogic rhetorical spaces are different from many other rhetorical spaces. Thus, integral to facilitating these rhetorical spaces is being clear about the nature of and guidelines for them so that people can, as necessary, adjust their expectations about the rhetorical space they will enter. Once, when I was part of the way through explaining some of the characteristics of dialogic rhetorical space to my students at the university in the Middle East, an engineering student asked, “If, at the end, we don’t arrive at a solution, then why do we do it?” This student’s realization of the difference between the rhetorical space of interfaith dialogue and the rhetorical spaces he was used to was an

important and necessary step. While still skeptical, he was able to understand the different purpose and adjust his expectations, making a good experience at the interfaith dialogue event he would attend more likely.

In chapter six, I present an “engagement facilitation toolbox” containing ten “tools” – practical ideas or activities that can help create or support dialogic rhetorical space. These tools incorporate some of the aspects listed above. For example, the Engaging Others Project (also described in chapter three), emphasizes the person-centered, person-focused aspect of dialogical rhetorical space. The Power in the Classroom “tool” incorporates and practically works out the rejection of (ab)use of power. Also, the Ideological Turing (Con)tests are a great way to celebrate and deepen participants’ understanding and appreciation of the allosensus that is part of the dialogic rhetorical space.

Perhaps the most important preparation for entering a dialogic rhetorical space is to adopt an appropriate dialogic-conducive rhetorical stance. In the next chapter I will explain how the construct of rhetorical stance can further contribute to both a better analysis of the attitudes and approaches of people interacting in a rhetorical space, and to the facilitation of peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous interaction in dialogic rhetorical spaces.

CHAPTER V

RHETORICAL STANCE: FINDING PEACEFUL, RESPECTFUL,  
GENUINE, GENEROUS WAYS OF FACING OTHERS

In the previous chapter, I proposed *rhetorical space*, the first of two constructs I have developed to explore and analyze interaction across and about faith and worldview difference. In this chapter I introduce the second construct – *rhetorical stance*. Like rhetorical space, the construct of rhetorical stance can help us better understand interfaith and inter-worldview interactions, but the two constructs help us explore different areas and pay attention to different relevant features and their relationships. Rhetorical space, as we have seen, explores the contexts of the interactions. Rhetorical stance, as we will see, focuses on the attitudes and approaches of the interlocutors. In this chapter, after explaining the construct of rhetorical stance and more specifically why I developed it, I will explore four aspects of rhetorical stances that can help us better understand their effect on interaction across faith and worldview difference. Each aspect includes or involves a recommendation that can help us facilitate interaction that is peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous.

**The Construct of Rhetorical Stance**

I define rhetorical stance as an individual or group's "way of facing" another person or group in a rhetorical space. This way of facing is an individual's or group's *orientation in the rhetorical space and approach toward the other(s)*. An individual's or

group's rhetorical stance is complexly shaped by their understandings and attitudes about:

- the self/selves individually and communally (“us”);
- the other(s) individually and communally (“them”);
- the topic being discussed and its context;
- the communicative interaction between the “us” and the “them”; and
- the rhetorical space of the interactions.

Many of these understandings and attitudes are interwoven and integrated parts of, and /or flow from the worldview(s)<sup>40</sup> of the interlocutor(s). However, as I will explain and illustrate more fully later in this chapter, it is important to recognize the possibility of a distinction (as well as interrelatedness) between rhetorical stance as a way of facing and worldview as a “way of seeing.” The importance and sense of this distinction grows as the diversity of worldviews in a rhetorical space grows. When (and because) a homogeneous community largely shares a common worldview (e.g. in the rhetorical space of one of the conservative evangelical churches described in the previous chapter), there is not as much need for a distinction between the way they “see” (that is make sense of) “life the universe and everything” and the way they face others in their community as they interact about their faith, beliefs, values, practices, etc. However, the distinction between the way any individual or group “sees” the world and “faces” others is much more important when there is more difference among the ways the different participants in the interaction make sense of life, the universe, and everything (e.g. in the rhetorical space of the student interfaith events described in the previous chapter).

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<sup>40</sup> See the discussion of “worldview” in chapter 1.



An explanation of the phrases I used above, *orientation in the rhetorical space* and *approach toward the other(s)*, and a brief example may help to clarify (and demonstrate a basic application of) the construct of rhetorical stance. First, rhetorical stance is an individual's or group's orientation in a rhetorical space. Thoughtful, caring participants in interaction across faith or worldview difference could ask, "Given the significant differences present in this rhetorical space (between our faith or worldview and the faiths or worldviews of the others), how can we genuinely and appropriately be (who we are) in this rhetorical space? How should we contextualize ourselves in(to) this rhetorical space? Where and how does it make sense for us to stand in this rhetorical space?" Second, participants then / also ask, "How should we genuinely and appropriately approach the other(s) in this rhetorical space? How should we verbally and non-verbally, explicitly and tacitly shape and frame our questions and comments to the other? How should we listen, interpret, and receive from the other?"<sup>41</sup> Often these questions don't have clear and final answers. (What is "appropriate" in any given rhetorical space?) Participants in interactions in these kind of rhetorical spaces make decisions based on a consideration of the effects or results of the possible rhetorical stances on both themselves and on the others. What are the "costs"? To whom? How can/should these costs be apportioned and minimized? While these kind of questions are routinely, if often unconsciously, asked in all sorts of rhetorical spaces, they are especially relevant and important in rhetorical spaces of engagement across and about faith and worldview difference.

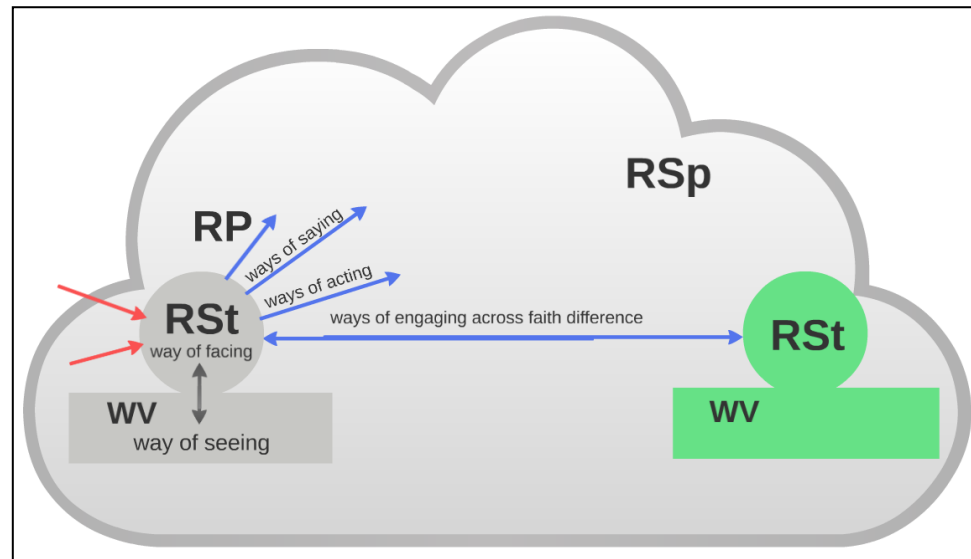
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<sup>41</sup> I used a prescriptive set of questions to explain these phrases because I think it makes the ideas clearer. A similar set of descriptively-oriented questions could be used to analyze rhetorical stances.

For a brief example of rhetorical stance, consider a conservative Christian pastor who believes it is important to pray “in Jesus’ name,” and who is asked to pray at a multi-faith event. This pastor, knowing there are those who would not appreciate, or even be “offended” at a prayer offered “in Jesus’ name,” must consider all of the above questions and make a decision about the rhetorical stance he will adopt in that rhetorical space – which will then guide his decision about how to pray there. On a practical level, this development and exploration of rhetorical stance will, I hope, help people, like this pastor, who are involved in interfaith and inter-worldview interaction to make these decisions. It should be noted that various participants’ decisions about and adoptions of rhetorical stances affect and shape the rhetorical space, which then may result in further changes of rhetorical stances, etc. The magnitude of change in these cycles may be moderated or limited by other aspects of the rhetorical space, for example the existence of explicit guidelines for an interfaith dialogue event.

A diagram may also be helpful. As illustrated in figure 1, a person's (grey image on left) rhetorical stance (RSt) in a specific rhetorical space (RSp) mediates or translates

her  
worldview  
(WV) to her  
rhetorical  
performance  
(RP), her  
(RP), her  
actual  
interactions  
in that



*Figure 1. Rhetorical Space and Rhetorical Stance*

specific rhetorical space – her ways of saying, ways of acting, and ways of engaging with another person across faith and worldview difference (green image on the right). The red arrows on the left represent aspects of the rhetorical space or the persons' environment more broadly that can affect their rhetorical stance.

The rhetorical stances a person or group adopts in various rhetorical spaces may be more or less consciously determined. In addition to being rooted in and informed by the person's or group's worldview "applied" to a specific rhetorical space, a rhetorical stance and rhetorical performances may be influenced by a host of personal factors, and by aspects of the rhetorical space. These may include psychological (e.g. feelings of fear, anger, love, surprise), sociological (e.g. who is observing the interaction), and environmental (e.g. location, temperature) factors (in addition to other aspects of rhetorical space discussed in the previous chapter). These factors may influence a

person's rhetorical stance or performance in ways that that would be seen as inconsistent with her worldview. For example, a person who highly values truthfulness may deceive her friend in a particularly embarrassing situation. A person who values peaceful relations and typically has a calm demeanor may, in an extremely stressful situation, shout angrily at her child or friend. A person who values treating all people with respect may interact less personally than usual with a parking garage attendant on a very cold morning.

It is also important to note that significantly different worldviews can produce remarkably similar rhetorical stances and rhetorical performances. For example, a conservative Christian and a liberal atheist may both treat a street person with respect (rhetorical performance), because both are committed to treating all people equally (rhetorical stance). However, different worldviews may have brought these two persons to a common rhetorical stance. The Christian is committed to equal treatment because she believes all people are created in God's image, the atheist because she believes equal treatment is a basic human right.

Finally, in this description of rhetorical stance, I have been emphasizing one direction of shaping or (in)forming – from worldview to rhetorical stance to rhetorical performance. While this is the primary direction of shaping, I suggest that in some contexts of engagement across difference, there is the potential for shaping and (in)forming to flow the other way. I believe that this can happen in different ways. Practicing a way of interacting – even being “forced” to, can influence or shape a rhetorical stance, which can eventually change aspects of worldview. This is a common way of socializing children, e.g. “Share that with your sister.”; “Are you going to say

you're sorry?"; etc. This also resonates with Wayne Booth's "hypocrisy upwards" in an educational setting (Denham, 2007). However, I suggest that there are also ways that, in contexts of interaction across faith and worldview difference, the rhetorical performance and, especially, the (perceived) rhetorical stance of one group or individual has potential to change the rhetorical performance, rhetorical stance, and even worldview of another – for the "better" or "worse."

### **Why Rhetorical Stance?**

One of the main grounds for my development of the construct of rhetorical stance was my observation (directly and indirectly) and analysis of situations where people refused or resisted engagement or dialogue across faith and worldview difference. I found this to be linked to how they did or did not approach others or how they perceived others to be or not to be approaching them. Following this section, I will discuss four aspects of rhetorical stances that I have found to have the potential to contribute to appreciation of or to resistance to engagement across difference. Under each one I will offer examples and suggest possible ways to facilitate peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement. Table 2 summarizes the four aspects I will discuss (in the order I will discuss them).

Table 2		
<i>Rhetorical Stances</i>		
We encourage rhetorical stances that are:	We appreciate engagement when the others:	We resist engagement when the others:
Peaceful	do <i>not</i> (ab)use power; ensure that all are treated equally	privilege their own beliefs or worldviews; control the conversations
Genuine	are honest about their and our faiths; discuss similarities and differences	are not (totally) honest about their and our faiths
Respectful	are epistemically and experientially humble	are arrogant about their beliefs and practices
Generous	listen to us; allow us to represent ourselves	refuse to listen; insist they understand our faith and its implications

Others have expressed concern about violent, resisted, refused, or blocked interactions across faith and worldview difference – and have suggested solutions. For example, Jürgen Habermas (2001, 2010) calls for a “common language” between “faith” and “reason” or (interestingly given my emphasis on a distinction between worldview and rhetorical stance) a “worldview-neutral language” between the religious and secular. Also, Peter Berger (2012) discusses a “secular discourse” which co-exists with religious or supernatural discourses and functions as a “default discourse” which enables people speaking different religious discourses to communicate (in what I would characterize as the practical but limited ways of a “trade language”). While my construct of rhetorical stance (and my project in general) has something in common with Habermas and Berger – facilitating more peaceful, respectful engagement between those of different faiths or worldviews, I aim to also facilitate people genuinely engaging *about* their faiths and worldviews.

What gives me hope is that I have been involved in and heard about situations where interlocutors in diverse rhetorical spaces do adopt appropriate rhetorical stances which facilitate peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous engagement across faith and worldview difference, for example, the student interfaith dialogue events I described in the previous chapter. More than that, I have also been involved in and heard about situations where rhetorical stances of refusal and resistance to engagement across difference were mitigated by the rhetorical stances and rhetorical performances of others. Examples of this would include some of the people I mentioned in chapter one who attended my Understanding Muslims and Arabs training and changed their views of Muslims. In the rest of this chapter, I will explain four aspects of rhetorical stances that can help us better understand interaction across faith and worldview difference, and can help us facilitate interaction that is (more) peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous.

### **Rhetorical Stances and the Unwarranted Privileging of (Parts of) Faiths and Worldviews**

One of the most common reasons I have found for people's resisting or refusing to engage across faith or worldview difference in a particular rhetorical space is their perception that core aspects of the others' worldview are privileged in a way that is not warranted in that rhetorical space. The others are making core aspects of their worldview part of the "common ground" or "foundation" or "warrant" on which the interaction is built, but not all participants in the rhetorical space agree that these aspects should be part of the foundation for the interaction. Put more simply, the people who resist interaction are saying to the other group, "You are treating your beliefs as 'ours', when they're not."

As the examples explored in this section will show, rhetorical stances that privilege aspects of worldviews in these ways are seen as unfair and are obstacles to

peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous engagement. The examples below will show aspects of worldviews that were privileged both from a relativist worldview, and from a conservative religious worldview. Whether or not it is done consciously, this privileging can cause resentment among those who do not share these positions. Often it is the “deeper” aspects or positions of a worldview (e.g. ontological and epistemological positions) that are privileged – and, thus, often this privileging is not conscious. Those holding non-privileged positions or positions contradicted by the privileged positions can feel put in an untenable place where what is very important to them or, indeed, “who they are” is systemically denied them in the context of the interaction – that their identity is threatened by the privileged positions. They also can feel not just disagreed with, or even just in a minority position, but actually silenced – feeling that some of the most powerful, compelling contributions they want to make to the conversation are somehow a priori excluded, disallowed, or just ignored. This resentment can precipitate reactions of aggression, withdrawal, or avoiding any interaction in this context. This kind of situation is obviously not conducive to peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith or worldview difference.

It is important to explain what I am *not* suggesting is an obstacle. I am not suggesting that interlocutors having different worldview positions is a problem – indeed that is exactly what my project is promoting. Nor am I suggesting that an open discussion of these positions is problematic. The obstacle arises when I adopt a rhetorical stance that treats aspects of “my” worldview as “ours” when they aren’t.

I also want to acknowledge that there can be rhetorical spaces where interaction across faith and worldview difference may (occasionally) occur, but where it may be seen



as acceptable, expected, and warranted for there to be rhetorical stances that privilege worldviews. One such example would be the conservative evangelical Christian churches described above. If a Muslim or atheist visited a worship service at one of these churches, (in most cases) both the visitor and the congregation would expect the pastor to preach in his normal manner, which would include a (legitimate, warranted) privileging of many aspects of Christian doctrine. However, I would hope that as leaders and members of this church participated in interactions across faith difference in more diverse rhetorical spaces outside the church, they would find ways to (re)structure their church's rhetorical spaces and their rhetorical stances such that their church would be more welcoming to and comfortable for visitors of other faiths and worldviews – while maintaining the church's rhetorical spaces as appropriate spaces for the primary interactions of worship, education, fellowship, etc.

### **Interreligious Sensitivity Training: An “Attempt at Aggressive Conversion”?**

One of the clearest examples of interfaith interaction that included a rhetorical stance that privileged aspects of the worldview of one side is a study conducted by Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2001) where he explored how well an *intercultural* sensitivity model could be adapted and used as an *interreligious* sensitivity model. He reported on the use of this adapted model in a series of workshops on peacebuilding conducted between 1996 and 1999. His report is based on his phenomenological experience of the workshops and open-ended interviews conducted with the participants. Abu-Nimer reports that his use of the Interreligious Sensitivity Model was mostly successful, but that the participants had problems with the final stages of the process.

While there was much that was, in my view, “right” with this study, I think the problems in the final stages of the process illustrate how a rhetorical stance privileging an aspect of one side’s worldview can become an obstacle to peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement. Abu-Nimer freely admits the failure of the last stages of the Interreligious Sensitivity Model – the adaptation and integration stages. He explains the discomfort of the students with these stages, and quotes students’ comments extensively. He reports that only one of 70 students was accepting of the adaptation stage. Abu-Nimer explores the failure of these stages. He admits that the study indicated “that religious values and beliefs can dictate different reactions among people than those usually emerging in response to intercultural interactions.” (2001, p702) He calls for “further research and experimental applications . . . to fully adapt the [Intercultural Sensitivity] model to an interreligious setting.” (2001, p701)

However, I think Abu-Nimer has missed the actual cause of the participants’ discomfort about these final stages. He concludes that, “[t]he realization of differences [in religious beliefs and values] can cause frustration, growing mistrust, suspicion, blaming others, and tension.” (2001, p702) While I don’t have access to all of his data, and, thus, cannot make an authoritative statement, I do see some evidence in the data reported that there is another cause for the students’ negative reactions. I suggest that the students’ “frustration, growing mistrust, suspicion, blaming others, and tension” were caused by Abu-Nimer’s privileging, in his rhetorical stance, a model which incorporated relativistic assumptions and goals, consistent with a generally postmodern worldview – NOT by the “realization of differences”. The participants were people of sincere faith. They believed that their religious beliefs were right and that conflicting beliefs of others

were wrong. While they were willing to explore, understand, and respect the beliefs of others; they were not willing to “accept” the others’ beliefs, adapt to those beliefs, and then integrate those beliefs with their own – which were the three components of the “religiorelativity” stage (adapted from the ethnorelativity stage).

A key issue here (and elsewhere) is how the word “accept” is used. The participants’ “willingness to accept” depended on the meaning of the word “accept”. If the word meant “accept and respect the right of other faiths to believe and practice differently” (2001, p699), then they would “accept other faiths”. If the word meant “refrain from judging one another’s beliefs, values and behaviors” (2001, p699), they would reject this relativistic understanding of acceptance.

I see several statements by Abu-Nimer and quotes of the participants which support my suggestion. Abu-Nimer states, “The notion that there are no absolute standards of right and wrong was strongly resisted by most participants. . . . [Participants believed that] certain absolute religious truths cannot coexist or be held by the same person” (2001, p699). This seems to clearly be a philosophical stance on the nature of truth, not, as Abu-Nimer supposes in the next sentence an indicator that the participants “have not acquired the skill or ability to experience the other’s world-view.” (2001, p699) Abu-Nimer even clearly identifies their philosophical stance, “[t]he general rejection of relativity in favor of certain absolute standards” (2001, p699), and also admits that this stance does not prevent them from “accept[ing] and respect[ing] the right of people of other faiths to believe and practice differently.” (2001, p699)

The participants rejected what they viewed as coercive proselytizing for a relativistic worldview. Abu-Nimer acknowledges, “Furthermore, [the final two stages of

the religiorelative model] caused them to feel more defensive and to question the moral and ethical assumptions of the training. *It was perceived as a threat – an attempt at aggressive conversion.*” (2001, p701, emphasis added) Thus, I am not sure what Abu-Nimer means when he follows this report of participants’ views with this sentence: “Thus, further research and experimental applications are needed to *fully* adapt the model to an interreligious setting.” (2001, p701, emphasis added) If “fully adapting the model” means continuing to privilege a relativistic worldview, I would suggest that this is counterproductive. It seems Abu-Nimer himself understands that the same – or very similar results could be achieved without this worldview privileging. The participants perceptively asked, “Why is internalizing more than one religion superior to having one religion and respecting the others?” (2001, p701) Abu-Nimer did not answer this question in the text of the article. This question implies that a better way forward would be to drop the final two stages of the religiorelative model – and thereby adopting a rhetorical stance that would be more acceptable to sincerely religious participants.

### **Other (Perceptions of) Privileging of Relativistic Worldviews**

Similar to the sincere religious believers in Abu-Nimer’s study, many conservative, sincere religious believers refuse or resist becoming involved in interfaith dialogue organizations and events because they object to what they see as the relativistic foundation or guidelines for interfaith dialogue and the prohibition of “witness” in interfaith events. Some also are uncomfortable with a syncretistic approach or even the “equality” they see promoted in interfaith events. (While most conservative sincere believers would agree to the equality of all people, they would object to the equality of all

religions or faiths.) Thus, many conservative, sincere religious believers feel that their participation would mean they were compromising their faith.

While there are interfaith coordinators and interfaith dialogue guidelines that promote this kind of dialogue or interaction and privilege a relativistic worldview (e.g. Burack, 2007; Cosijns, 2008), there are many others that do not (e.g. Eck, n.d.; Laurence, n.d.). One of the key differences between various approaches or guidelines to interfaith dialogue is the level at which the guidelines function – whether at the worldview level or at the rhetorical stance and/or rhetorical performance levels. In his interfaith dialogue guidelines, Cosijns, like Abu-Nimer, privileges a relativistic worldview, including guidelines written at the worldview level that are unacceptable to many conservative, sincere people of faith. Cosijns’ guidelines state that in the long run intercultural and interfaith dialogue “will lead to a more universal homogeneity and a final global unity.” Like Abu-Nimer, the guidelines call for “respect”, but a “respect” (or “acceptance”) which will result in “readiness to integrate some of [the others’] values to enrich one’s own cultural and religious values.” The guidelines also assert that, “The tenets of world religions and other faith traditions have their roots in their native culture” (i.e. not in divine revelation), and thus, “no faith community should claim exclusive representation of the Truth or superiority”, and “in the absence of claims to the absolute truth, there is no need for converting others.” While these guidelines, like Abu-Nimer’s model, would be acceptable to many, and could result in peaceful and respectful dialogue, a very significant portion of religious people would resist these guidelines, seeing them as privileging a relativistic worldview they could not agree with. Additionally, if

conservative, sincere religious believers did decide to participate, the guidelines could limit the genuineness of their interactions or affect their attitudes toward the interactions.

Other interfaith coordinators and interfaith dialogue guidelines function in accordance with my recommendation that beliefs or (parts of) faiths or worldviews are not privileged in an unwarranted way. For an example of these, I will refer to the guidelines I developed in conjunction with students for the university interfaith events I described above (see Appendix B). By using my own guidelines, I am able to explain the rationale and motivation that was behind the guidelines. Knowing that many of the student participants were conservative, sincere Muslims and Christians, I sought to avoid the above problems associated with privileging a certain worldview. Mutual respect, the equality of all human persons, and “freedom of thought, conscience and religion” including the freedom to change one’s beliefs or religion were all foundational guidelines, based not on any one worldview, but on widespread (but not “universal”) acceptance (e.g. “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” n.d.), and especially the acceptance of those involved in the interfaith event.<sup>42</sup> In my guidelines, respect was not seen as necessarily leading to “acceptance” or integration of the others’ values, but as a basis for genuine engagement about similarities as well as differences, leading to mutual understanding. My guidelines do not prohibit witness or claims of exclusive truth by participants, but do guide how these are expressed. For example, in addition to stipulating that participants “should have a sincere desire to learn about the others’ faith –

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<sup>42</sup> When one of my best students came to my office to discuss these rights, she explained that she did not think that the freedom to change one’s religion or faith was a basic human right, but that this so-called “universal right” was forced on the rest of the world by powerful western countries. While we did talk about this for quite some time on multiple occasions (including my pointing out of how other cultures express and value this right), and while I believe that we came to a better understanding of each others’ positions, we did not, as most often happens in interfaith dialogue, come to any substantial agreement on this issue.

to really understand why they believe and practice as they do”, the guidelines recognize that many participants “come to the dialogue [desiring] to clearly present the beauty, reason and content of [their] own faith and faith journey.” Rather than making worldview-level statements about or against the concept of absolute truth, my guidelines remind participants that we all are finite and fallible creatures and encourage an epistemically and experientially humble rhetorical stance from which we say “I believe this is true” and not “This is true.” Student leaders and student participants who were conservative, sincere believers appreciated these kind of guidelines. One Muslim student told me he came so he could encourage other students to become Muslims – which was fine – provided he followed the guidelines about how he interacted. Rick Love is a strong advocate for interfaith dialogue who addresses this issue of witness. In talks given at Georgetown University and at The World Bank (Love, 2008, 2010), he explores “The Ethics of Da‘wah and Evangelism: Respecting the Other and Freedom of Religion” (the title of one of the talks). Da‘wah is the Arabic word for invitation and it is the term used for Islamic outreach or witness. While admitting this is a hot topic, he argues, as I do, that there is an appropriate place for appropriate witness in interfaith dialogue.

But there is also a problem with perception. As mentioned above, many sincere believers do not participate in interfaith activities based in part on their perception that interfaith dialogue *entails* relativistic assumptions, like Cosijns. In fact, many interfaith organizations do *not* base their work on these assumptions and are trying to reach out to these sincere believers. For example, Diana Eck of the Pluralism Project at Harvard goes out of her way to address these misperceptions. She writes:

Pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments* [which] does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind. . . . It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences. . . . [P]luralism is *based on dialogue* . . . give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table -- with one’s commitments. (Eck, n.d.)

The blog “Faith Line Protestants: Living Christian in a Religiously Diverse World” (“Faith Line Protestants | Living Christian in a religiously diverse world,” n.d.) actively explores the phenomenon of evangelical Christians’ non- or under-involvement in interfaith dialogue in their own articles and articles they repost from other organizations involved in interfaith work. They have articles titled:

“Can Evangelicals be Involved in Interfaith Work?”

“The #1 Tip for Engaging Evangelicals in Interfaith Work Is ...”

“Christian Witnessing: An Evangelical’s Guide to Interfaith Engagement”

“Born Again Christian + Interfaith Activist = Not Mutually Exclusive”

“3 Reasons Evangelicals Don’t Do Interfaith Dialogue & 3 Ways Forward”

Their analyses echo the points mentioned above.

Richard Cimino (2005) provides a revealing look at evangelical Christians resistance against what they see as privileged worldviews on a culture-wide level. Cimino did a content analysis of books published by evangelical Christians in the years prior to and following 9/11. He found that post-9/11, most of the authors he reviewed



drew “sharper boundaries” between Islam and Christianity. Most emphasized the distinctness of the two faiths, maintaining, for example, that “Muslims do not worship the same god as Christians do.” Also, many argued that Islam is an inherently violent religion (and, by implication, that Christianity is not). Cimino also noted that there were a minority of evangelical Christian authors (and other vocal Christians) who rejected these moves by the majority of evangelical Christians. Cimino suggested that the majority “reinforce the boundaries” moves may have been made in response not only, or even *not primarily to a perceived threat from Muslims, but to a perceived threat from relativism and syncretism which they see as common in an increasingly pluralistic society*. This second perceived threat was also highlighted and more “felt” following 9/11 because of the many statements about Islam made by media personalities, government leaders, scholars, and some religious leaders that emphasized that Islam was a peaceful religion and portrayed Islam as continuous with Judaism and Christianity as Abrahamic faiths. (See further discussion of this phenomena in the next main section.)

### **Conversational Hegemony: Privileging Theistic Worldviews in Witnessing**

Those with “relativistic” worldviews are not the only ones who sometimes privilege aspects of their worldviews in unwarranted ways. Conservative religious believers also sometimes engage in this kind of unwarranted privileging. Many people who strongly believe and follow a faith or worldview talk to others about their faith or worldview. They may talk with others about what they believe, how they live, and how what they believe informs and guides their lives. They may talk about the beauty or logic or power of their beliefs and practices. They may also encourage others to consider the claims or tenets of their religion or worldview, and even invite others to adopt their faith or worldview – or to convert to their religion. This range of interaction can be called

witnessing or evangelizing or proselytizing or outreach or advocacy – each word eliciting slightly different senses, feels, and contexts. People who do this often do it because they are convinced of their own faith or worldview. Many also feel they should witness because they believe they have “the truth” and/or because they understand that they are told to witness in their scriptures. Most people who would practice some form of witness tend toward exclusivism or absolutism – as opposed to relativism. They believe that the beliefs and practices (or abstention from practices) that are part of their faith are true or good and that other beliefs and practices that contradict them are false or evil.

Witnessing and exclusivism in diverse rhetorical spaces can be tricky. In my classroom research which I reported on in chapter three, I found, not surprisingly, that most students reported negative experiences with and feelings toward witnessing. Based on my analysis of student experiences with and attitudes toward witnessing, along with my observation of witnessing and talking about witnessing with conservative evangelical Christians, I suggest that the negative responses to and feelings about witnessing are caused by discomfort with a privileging of beliefs that is not warranted in the rhetorical space in which it is happening. It seems to be a clear example of the witness-er making her beliefs “ours” when they aren’t. This seems to happen in two main ways – definitive statements that (aim to) establish “truths” (e.g. “God created the universe”) that are not shared, and “judgments” (e.g. “You are going to hell.”) that are not shared. These privileging moves may be direct, e.g. simply asserting that, “Jesus will come back to earth.” Or they may be indirect, for example via a loaded question like this: “If you were standing before God and he asked, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’, what would

you say?”<sup>43</sup> This question seeks to establish a host of “truths” which those being witnessed to may not agree on, including: there is a personal God; there is a personal, conscious afterlife; there is a literal heaven; there is some kind of criteria to get into that heaven; and God functions as judge. It makes sense that people who make these privileging moves are described by my students (and others) as “adamant and aggressive”, “pushy”, “harsh” and “stubborn.” A couple students included similar negative comments about atheists’ “witnessing” to non-atheists.

Another type of privileging move reported by my students is the use of emotions. Students reported being told by the person witnessing or holding exclusive beliefs that he or she “pitied” them, or “felt sorry” for them because they did not believe, or “wished” that they would believe. These statements privilege both the beliefs and the believer that expresses them, putting that believer in the higher position of the one who pities, etc. the one in a lower position. Students reported responding to all of these moves, but especially to this use of emotions, by becoming silent and avoiding any conversation which might lead to issues of faith.

As I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, having observed evangelical Christians being taught how to evangelize, and talking among themselves about witnessing (and having taken part in these conversations), I can confidently report that the vast majority of witnessing Christians I have observed do not want to act or come off in these ways. However, they truly believe in an exclusive salvation – that only those

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<sup>43</sup> This is one of two diagnostic questions that evangelical Christians have been taught to use in their personal evangelism in training and/or materials from the organization Evangelism Explosion (<http://evangelismexplosion.org/>). I cannot determine if these questions are still included in their training programs. It should also be noted that these questions were first developed over fifty years ago when the rhetorical spaces in which they were used would have been less diverse and there would have been a greater chance that the “truths” the questions imply would have been assented to by those involved in the interaction.

who “accept Jesus as their personal Savior” will be “saved” and “go to heaven when they die.” Because of this and their commitment to follow the commands of Scripture, which includes the command to witness, they want to and feel compelled to witness. Yet many of them struggle because they also feel the awkwardness of the situations – as described from the other side by my students. Unfortunately, this awkwardness is seen by some as indicative of a good, not a bad situation. Some evangelical Christian leaders will tell their followers that, “You have to get them lost before they can be (told how to become) saved.” These leaders will also will “reason” that a Christian being “hated” by non-Christians is an indication that a person is witnessing in a right and good way because Jesus predicted that people in the world “will hate you because of me” (Matthew 10:22, Mark 13:13, Luke 21:17, John 15:18).<sup>44</sup>

Given these two sides of these often negative interfaith interactions (the negative feelings and conclusions of the witness-ee and the awkwardness felt by the witness-er), I suggest that rhetorical space and rhetorical stance could have value here not just as research constructs, but also as tools for praxis and for training.<sup>45</sup> They could help provide an answer to the rhetorical question that conservative evangelical preachers often use to encourage (or “guilt trip”) their congregations into doing more witnessing. These preachers ask, but don’t answer, this question, “Why, if you have the best news in the world (i.e. the Gospel), don’t you tell more people about it?” Congregants go out feeling guilty for being terrible Christians and letting God down and maybe even being responsible for people going to hell because they didn’t witness to them. They resolve to

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<sup>44</sup> Obviously, many Christians would want to, for a host of textual, contextual, and other reasons, offer alternative interpretations, understandings, and potential applications of these verses.

<sup>45</sup> I plan to further research ways that this aspect and the rest of this chapter could find application in developing education or training for conservative, sincere believers that would facilitate their (increased and more appropriate) involvement in interfaith dialogue.

screw up their courage and witness to their colleagues at the office or at school no matter how awkward and reluctant they feel, and regardless how bad they know it will go. They resolve “not to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” Setting aside the host of theological, homiletical / pedagogical, psychological, and sociological issues this true-to-life scenario raises, I point out that the question never gets (adequately) answered – and it needs to be. Briefly, I suggest that the reason these Christians don’t witness more is that they accurately sense the awkwardness – that their witnessing is often inappropriate for the rhetorical spaces where they are witnessing.

I believe that the distinction between worldview and rhetorical stance is very useful here. The witnessing Christians (or others) do not necessarily need to change their worldview or faith, nor do they need to stop witnessing. Rather, they should take time to understand the rhetorical spaces where they want to witness, and then consider what rhetorical stances they could adopt that would be *both* true to their faith *and* appropriate for the rhetorical spaces – rhetorical stances that do *not* involve privileging (parts of) their faith in unwarranted ways. I would (again) suggest that one initial and very basic way to do this is to preface beliefs with “I believe...” when in a diverse rhetorical space. This allows believers to clearly state their beliefs without privileging them. Believers may also find that for certain rhetorical spaces there may not be any appropriate rhetorical stances for witnessing – other than loving their neighbors.

As I mentioned earlier, students who participated in my classroom research (and largely reacted negatively to witnessing) gave advice to those who witness for their faith. Some of their suggestions are worth repeating here: getting permission first; witnessing only with those with whom the witness-er already has a relationship; having interest in

others beyond faith; and welcoming questions. Also, a few of my students (and some Christians I have known) have reported witnessing situations that “went well.” Often the rhetorical stances of the witness-ers involved in these cases reflect these suggestions and/or thoughtfulness about appropriate rhetorical stances for different rhetorical spaces.

I stated above that witnessing believers do not necessarily need to change their worldview or faith. I want to, at this point, supplement that statement. I would like to suggest that any person of faith who sincerely engages across faith and worldview difference will find ways that her faith is challenged and encouraged, questioned and reaffirmed, changed and deepened. I, along with many other people of faith, would argue that this is a very beneficial part of engaging across faith and worldview difference.

Finally, I want to report on a couple of ways this issue of witness has been addressed on a global scale. Significantly large and diverse groups of Muslims and Christians have gathered to (directly or indirectly) address this issue of appropriate witness in a religiously and non-religiously diverse world. As I mentioned in the first chapter, in 2007, a diverse group of Muslim leaders published an open letter to Christians called “A Common Word Between Us and You” (“The Official Website of A Common Word,” 2009) which invited Christians to dialogue with them. This document acknowledged that Islam and Christianity are both “witnessing faiths”, and offered ways to engage with each other in peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous ways. This invitation has been accepted by many Christian leaders and has been the impetus for major meetings between Muslims and Christians and publications by Muslims and Christians. In 2011 a similarly diverse group of Christians released a document called “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct” which

they had been jointly developing since 2006 (“Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World,” 2011). This document also offered suggestions about witnessing in a diverse, pluralistic world.

### **Rhetorical Stances and Negative and Positive Essentializing Moves**

A common guideline for interfaith dialogue is that participants should not compare the best of their tradition with the worst of the other tradition. This, while it does happen, seems to be pretty clearly an unfair move that comes from a rhetorical stance that would be resisted – a stance that was not genuine or honest about one’s own and the other’s tradition. This kind of a move can be easily pointed out to be inaccurate to those involved in interfaith or inter-worldview interactions. However, there are similar “positive” essentializing moves that are common in interfaith interactions and are made with the best of motives, and are intended to facilitate interactions across faith difference that are peaceful and respectful, yet can be counterproductive. I will argue that a rejection of both negative and positive essentializing moves, and a commitment to admitting and discussing complexity and diversity in our own and others’ faiths and worldviews are essential elements of a rhetorical stance that is conducive to peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference.

In the United States, following 9-11 there were large-scale and negative reactions against Muslims that manifested themselves in personal conversations, in demonstrations, in verbally violent and aggressive attacks as well as physically violent and deadly attacks against Muslims – or people who “looked like” Muslims (i.e. people who appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent). In addition to giving vent to raw hatred, most of these reactions were essentializing moves that lashed out against Islam, seeing it as inherently violent, and against all Muslims, seeing them as somehow responsible for the deadly

attacks of 9-11. Unfortunately there were, and still are, similar negative essentializing moves in some segments of the media, the press, and especially social media.

Naturally, many people, including political and religious leaders, resisted these hateful reactions and negative essentializing moves in various ways – seeking to restrain verbal and physical violence against Muslims and promote peaceful relations with Muslims. In this context there were many leaders and citizens who spoke and worked to protect individual Muslims and Muslim communities against this backlash, and to sponsor interfaith and inter-worldview events which included Muslims. While appreciating and applauding all that was done to counter the hateful and violent reactions against Muslims, and to build better interfaith and inter-worldview relations; and recognizing the significant limitations present in the contexts of much of this good work; I want to explore one common tactic used in these efforts – and the reaction against it. Two of the messages that were heard from political and religious leaders, and from citizens were that “Islam is religion of peace” and that those who carried out the attacks were “not real Muslims.” I understand and agree with the sense and spirit of these statements, however, I want to suggest that these messages and others like them were and are seen as positive essentializing statements and were and are rejected by some of those who were and are in most “need” of hearing what is at the heart of these messages. Those who reject these messages can easily find counter evidence, for example Surah 9:5 in the Quran which reads, “Slay the infidels wherever you find them.” This counter evidence, then, justifies, in their eyes, their rejection of any messages promoting more peaceful and respectful interfaith relations – seeing these messages as false and the leaders that send them as either out of touch with reality or, more likely (in their eyes), as



creating facts to serve their own ideological purposes. Messages that admit the complexity of interpretation and religious motivation and point out the diversity present in all major religions are more difficult to craft and more time-consuming to deliver (i.e. they don't make good sound bites), but may have a better chance of being received. To illustrate and better understand how and why these type of positive essentializing moves can be counterproductive, I will explore one popular example of this kind of move and one scholarly example of a critique of these moves.

In 2005 director Ridley Scott released the film "Kingdom of Heaven". It portrays events in and around Jerusalem in the years leading up to the Third Crusade (1180's). The main character Balian has lost his wife (she committed suicide) and his faith. The movie follows him on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem where he finds himself in the midst of conflict between Christian Crusaders and Muslim Arabs. The film highlights the siege and taking of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187.

Director Ridley Scott (2005) and writer William Monahan clearly wanted to make a film that showed the possibility of peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians. While they showed some Christian and Muslim "bad guys", many of the Christians and Muslims were "good guys". There are a lot of good comments about personal spirituality and social justice throughout the movie, e.g. "Some say the place to seek forgiveness is in Jerusalem. I say the place is here and now." "I put no stock in religion. ... Holiness is in right action. And courage on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves." "I shall confess to God when I see him... not to you." "It is a kingdom of conscience, or nothing." Near the end of the movie, Balian is surprised by the generosity of Saladin's terms when he surrenders Jerusalem – Saladin allows everyone to leave the city freely.

So why would anyone react negatively to this film that seems to serve as an example of how Muslims and Christians could get along better? Peter Hammond, head of a Christian ministry based in South Africa, summarizes his review of the movie, “Scott’s Kingdom of Heaven is politically correct, anti-Christian, pro-Muslim propaganda. It makes poor entertainment and is a worthless distortion of reality” (Hammond, n.d.). Hammond’s rejection of the call for more peaceful interfaith relations is (ostensibly) based on his view that Scott distorted history for his own agenda. Hammond outlines some of these distortions and is actually technically right about them. For example, the film contrasts Saladin’s 1187 conquering of Jerusalem with the Crusader conquering of Jerusalem in 1099. Saladin, when conquering Jerusalem in 1187, did act better than the Crusader leaders (or at least their soldiers) who conquered Jerusalem in 1099. In 1099 Crusader soldiers disobeyed orders and slaughtered hundreds of Muslim and Jewish men, women and children. Saladin, however, allowed only those who could pay a ransom go free, the rest were sold into slavery (“Crusades :: The crusader states to 1187,” 2009; Madden, 2005). While better than the slaughter of 1099, Saladin’s actions would not seem like those of a “good guy” to people today. Thus, in the movie, Saladin is shown as much nicer – he just lets them all go free. (Also, no explicit mention was made of Saladin’s ordering the execution of hundreds, and selling into slavery thousands of others following the previous battle of Hattin.) In another scene, King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem was portrayed in the movie as a peace-loving, tolerant guy who was very angry at those attacking Muslims. However, in history, he went into a rage when Guy of Lusignan did NOT attack Saladin in 1183 (Madden, 2005). Hammond is clearly bothered by these changes, as well as the negative way that Scott

portrays some of the Christians who are more “conservative” or closely aligned to the formal church. Hammond sees these elements in the film as being driven by Scott’s agenda. Hammond may be right about Scott’s agenda. He includes a couple of quotes from Scott: “Balian is an agnostic, just like me.” and “If we could just take God out of the equation, there'd be no f---ing problem” (Hammond, n.d.).<sup>46</sup>

Rahma Bavelaar, in her review on islamonline.net, is more gracious than Hammond, but makes a similar point,

Although I do not question Scott’s good intentions, . . . [the film] does not contribute to increased mutual understanding and does little to promote tolerance, *as true tolerance requires the acceptance the “other” as he is, not as we would like him to be.* The victor in Scott’s Crusades are neither moderate Muslims nor Christians, but the deeply secular, man-centered and anti-esoteric worldview, so pervasive and overbearing in the modern Western world, a victor that bears no resemblance to either the deeply pious medieval Christian masses or the average conservative modern Arab Muslim. (2005 emphasis added)

In his critique of the film, medieval historian and expert on the Crusades, Thomas Madden, echoes Bavelaar’s point, “Based on media interviews, Scott, Monahan, and the leading actors clearly believe that their story can help bring peace to the world today. *Lasting peace, though, would be better served by candidly facing the truths of our shared past, however politically incorrect those might be*” (2005, emphasis added).

As I have shown, Scott’s rhetorical stance, including his positive essentializing moves, failed to promote better interfaith relations for those who are, arguably, the most

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<sup>46</sup> While I have seen the first quote in several other places, I have only found the second quote in one other source (Howse, 2005).

important part of the audience – those who are skeptical of the message. In this case, Hammond, based on the anti-Muslim bias shown in his review (and website), was very “in need” of this message, yet he reacted very strongly against the movie. One might suggest that even if Scott had not made the essentializing moves, Hammond might still have rejected the message. This is true – and it is important to recognize that the recommendations about rhetorical stance I am making are not panaceas and do not guarantee “success.” However, adopting a rhetorical stance that rejects negative or positive essentializing moves, and honestly admits and fairly discusses the complexity and diversity of our own and others’ religions – including the parts that bother us – removes at least some potential cause for resistance to or rejection of interfaith engagement. While a film that genuinely and accurately explored this tragic period of inter-religious violence, without making essentializing moves, might not become a Hollywood blockbuster, it could stimulate sobering reflection and beneficial interfaith dialogue about potential and actual violent expression and exploitation of one’s own and others’ religions – and about ways to together work against such violence.

Christopher J van der Krogt (2010) explores similar positive essentializing moves among non-Muslim scholars of Islam. In an article published in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, he explores how non-Muslim scholars represent the Islamic concept of jihad. He explains that many academic scholars of religion are anxious to present a positive image of Islam, both to students and the public. This is motivated by the presence and proliferation of hostile views of Islam by some scholars (e.g. Daniel Pipes, Martin Kramer), polemicists (e.g. Andrew Bostom, Robert Spencer), and many conservative Christian leaders. van der Krogt suggests that some scholars will idealize

Islam, including the concept of jihad, in order to counter these hostile views. He focuses on the writing and comments of John Esposito who has written widely on Islam and is a regular commentator on Islam. van der Krogt claims that Esposito and others seek to present jihad primarily as a peaceful internal struggle with self – an attempt at self-control and self-improvement. They only occasionally admit any war-like meaning of the word – and when they do they only mention it as self-defense. Throughout the article, van der Krogt explores and quotes the Quran, Hadith and Muslim scholars to show the breadth of the meanings and interpretations of jihad to Muslims historically: jihad as self-defense; jihad as moral improvement; and jihad as terrorism. He specifically, from these texts, challenges many of the assertions of Esposito. Overall, his point is that scholars should not change aspects of a religion to make them more acceptable. van der Krogt states,

In investigating a religion that is not one's own, allowance must be made for the otherness and integrity of that religion: it is not something that should be construed according to the values or expectations of an outsider. Nor should a particular stream within that religion be taken as normative at the expense of variants the outsider finds less congenial. (2010, p. 139)

van der Krogt's argument and examples support my recommendation that those engaging across or about religious or faith difference should not make positive essentializing moves – even if others are making negative essentializing moves. In addition to damaging the genuineness of interfaith interaction, van der Krogt points to the ways that essentializing moves do not respect the integrity of the religion. I would also argue that they also do not respect those holding that religion. A more genuine and

respectful presentation of the Islamic concept of jihad by a non-Muslim would offer various interpretations and “applications” of jihad, along with information about which scholarly traditions support which interpretations. A Muslim, on the other hand, could, additionally, advocate for her preferred interpretation or understanding.

As both of these examples illustrate, there is a strong urge in fair-minded people who care about social justice to counter negative essentializing moves about the other. We must, though, be careful how we respond to these moves, and avoid responses that could be counterproductive, e.g. those that could be (seen as) positive essentializing moves. Thus, I suggest a rejection of both negative and positive essentializing moves, and a commitment to admitting and discussing complexity and diversity in our own and others’ faiths and worldviews are essential elements of a rhetorical stance that is conducive to peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference.

### **Rhetorical Stances, Respect, and Epistemic and Experiential Humility**

In the preceding two main sections, I have discussed two “don’ts” of rhetorical stances – things that can and do hinder peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous engagement across faith and worldview difference, namely privileging faiths or worldviews in unwarranted ways and making positive or negative essentializing moves. In this section and the next, I will discuss two “do’s” of rhetorical stances: being epistemically and experientially humble; and responding generously to others.

One of the key adjectives I use to describe the kinds of interactions across faith and worldview difference that I want to facilitate is respectful. Interactions and interlocutors that are respectful tend to make participants less defensive and more willing to listen and engage. Generally, the level of a person’s respect for another seems to

correlate negatively with epistemic and experiential arrogance in the other and positively with epistemic and experiential humility in the other. To put it simply, people don't like to talk with others who know they are right and only consider their own knowledge and experience valid. This can get tricky when strong conservative believers of different faiths are interacting with each other or with those having non-religious worldviews. These believers often express certainty about their beliefs, practices, and experiences in ways that, in certain rhetorical spaces, can be perceived as lacking in humility or even arrogant, which often raises defensiveness and lowers the likelihood of peaceful, respectful, and generous interaction. In this section I want to explore these expressions of certainty and their roots. I also will suggest that the idea of rhetorical stance being distinguishable from worldview can help these participants to (be perceived to) engage more respectfully.<sup>47</sup>

This certainty is rooted in strong, conservative believers' belief that their holy books are revealed or "inspired" by God and are the "Word of God." Thus, they are without any errors or mistakes (inerrant and infallible) and are authoritative for the believers' faith and practice. These books are considered both true (accurate factually in all respects) and True (the [basis for the] one, correct worldview – the right way to understand and answer all questions about "life, the universe, and everything"). Many, while admitting that God has revealed himself [sic] in other ways, e.g., through creation, see the written holy books as the primary or clearer revelation. I have heard evangelical Christian apologists and teachers instruct students and followers that Christians should

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<sup>47</sup> This section is related to the section above about privileging of worldviews. In that section I pointed out that expressing certainty in rhetorical spaces of engagement across faith and worldview difference can be (seen to be) a privileging move. Here I will explore how and why certainty is an integral part of many strong conservative believers' worldviews, and suggest a possible way that these believers might be able to engage respectfully across faith and worldview difference.

view everything (or “the world”) through the lens of the “Word.” This “high view of Scripture” is also reflected in a children’s song that is commonly taught to the young children of Christian families in conservative evangelical churches:

The B I B L E [spelled out],  
Yes, that’s the book for me.  
I stand alone on the Word of God,  
The B I B L E

Many conservative Muslims have, in some ways, an even stronger view of the Quran. Evangelical Christians believe in verbal, plenary inspiration – that God guided and directed the writing of the books of the Bible such that every word was what he wanted written, but they acknowledge that most of the Bible is not written as God’s direct speech, but is written as history or poetry or letters, etc. from the human author’s perspective. Christians see these understandings as compatible. Many Muslims, however, believe that the Quran was revealed word for word – dictated – by God to the prophet Mohammed in Arabic. It is hard to overestimate the reverence and confidence that these strong, conservative believers have for and in their holy books. This reverence, confidence, and certainty is routinely expressed in the strong and dogmatic way these believers often speak about their holy books and their faith and practice. They feel that to speak less strongly or dogmatically would be compromising their faith.

Furthermore, these beliefs and the accompanying reverence, confidence, and certainty entail a foundationalist, fully (also called naïve) realist understanding of truth and knowledge. Historically, many of these believers have embraced this kind of philosophical orientation without an explicit understanding that they have been



embracing one orientation over another. For them, as for many people, the various philosophical orientations (including the understandings of truth, being, and knowledge) that effectively become part of their faith (or worldview) have been understood as common sense or simply “the way things are.” As religious, worldview, and cultural diversity in many parts of the world has become more common and more apparent to more people, increasing numbers of conservative believers, especially those who have enjoyed privilege in society based on their faith, have become more aware of other worldviews and how they differ from their own. These believers have reacted differently. Some have merely become more aware, some have adopted some aspects, and some have strongly rejected these other worldviews. As I pointed out in the discussion of worldview in chapter one, the cultural, social, and psychological functions of worldview (Hiebert, 2008, pp. 29–30) point to the potential for discomfort, misunderstanding, and conflict when people holding different worldviews or faiths of any kind interact. This potential discomfort and conflict can be exacerbated for those having certainty-oriented faiths.

In America, some conservative evangelical Christian leaders see relativist, postmodern views of “truth” as especially dangerous to the faith of lay people who are in their churches or follow their ministries. Thus, their defense of the Christian faith necessarily entails a strong defense of their realist orientations toward truth and knowledge, and their certainty oriented understandings of faith. Many of these leaders have written books to “defend truth” and fight against postmodernism, for example, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (MacArthur, 2007), *Truth Matters: Confident Faith in a Confusing World* (Köstenberger, Bock, & Chatraw, 2014),

*Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism*

(Groothuis, 2000), *Culture Shift: Engaging Current Issues With Timeless Truth* (Mohler, Jr., 2008), and *Be Intolerant: Because Some Things Are Just Stupid* (Dobson & Scott, 2007). Several years ago the conservative Christian organization Focus on the Family spent two million dollars producing “The Truth Project” (*The truth project*, 2007), a small-group DVD series which is “the starting point for looking at life from a biblical perspective” (“Dr. Dobson Introduces The Truth Project,” 2006, “The Truth Project,” n.d.). These books and the beliefs and worldviews that are behind them and encouraged by them are very dichotomistic (clearly distinguishing “truth” from “lies”) and confrontational (fighting and defending against the enemy). Furthermore, and logically following from the above, I have found that these kind of leaders rarely talk or write about interpretation of scripture. When they do, they explain that their interpretation is clearly (and simply) the “right” or “correct” interpretation, and that other interpretations are “wrong,” “dangerous,” and “twist the words of scripture.” These leaders also accuse others of developing their interpretations with wrong motives – to “accommodate” to the “world” or to “human wisdom.” More often these conservative leaders simply present their own teaching as *the* “clear” or “plain” meaning of scripture. Acknowledging the validity or even possibility of other interpretations, or being uncertain which interpretation best addresses the variety of textual, historical, rhetorical, etc. issues necessarily lessens certainty and, thus in their minds, lessens confidence in scripture and the faith.<sup>48</sup>

So the question regarding these leaders and their followers, given their foundationalist and dichotomistic view of truth, their certainty about their beliefs, and

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<sup>48</sup> Various interpretations of minor doctrinal issues are sometimes admitted.

their emphasis on fighting and defending, is whether they can engage across faith and worldview difference in any kind of epistemologically humble way – in a way that would not be (seen as) arrogant – and, thus, in a way that would facilitate respectful interaction.

Sharon Crowley (2006), in her book *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*, basically explored this question. She focused on the lack of civility between liberalism and Christian fundamentalism<sup>49</sup> in America. Crowley wrote the book to “determine whether there is any way in to the intellectual, religious, and political differences” between the two (2006, p. x). Crowley was clearly frustrated by fundamentalists’ certainty and the noncontingency of their foundational beliefs, seeing these as making genuine engagement with outsiders difficult or impossible. She also freely admitted her status as an “outsider” to religious conservatism, the limitations of this status, her aversion to many aspects of Christian fundamentalism, and even her desire to warn others of the dangers she believes the apocalypticism of fundamentalists poses to democracy, yet she remained committed to finding “any way in.” She concluded the book with a several good rhetorical strategies for liberals and progressives (her main audience) aimed at making civil discourse with fundamentalists more likely (and also aimed at increasing the chances of convincing them to moderate their positions and change their values). The first three are more general strategies: gaining attention through story and conjecture; arousing affective response; and being aware of the others’ and one’s own core values and agendas. The second three are more specifically strategies to challenge and change the values and beliefs of conservative Christians.

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<sup>49</sup> I have generally avoided using the terms “fundamentalist” and “fundamentalism” because, while a relatively small number of conservative evangelical Christians would self identify as “fundamentalists,” the terms generally carry negative connotation and are used pejoratively. Also, the question I am exploring concerns conservative evangelical Christians who would not self-identify as fundamentalists.

Crowley suggests demonstrating the superiority of alternative values, but admitting the unlikelihood of doing this broadly, suggests redefining “narrowly defined” values such as “family,” and finding and emphasizing Christian values that liberals would endorse, such as love of neighbor. She also suggests demonstrating the contingency of certain values and disarticulating certain beliefs from others they are typically articulated with. At the beginning and end of her description of these final three strategies, she mentions that how well these strategies will work depends on the circumstances and the relationship between the interlocutors. Thus, this engagement requires discernment, time, and patience. Most of Crowley’s strategies resonate with suggestions I have made, especially this last meta-strategy.

I would suggest, and I think Crowley would agree, that it is unlikely that many “fundamentalists” will be convinced that values they believe are biblical are contingent in any way. Nor will they likely be convinced to “disarticulate the ideologic” of any part of their “biblical worldview” or to abandon their certainty and foundationalist orientation in response to arguments from “postmodern” progressives or liberals. This raises again the question of whether there any ways that would make it more likely for these conservative leaders and their followers to engage in epistemically humble ways – in ways that would not be (seen as) arrogant – and, thus, in ways that would facilitate respectful interaction.

My construct of rhetorical stance may offer a different “way in.” I believe that these conservative evangelical Christians (and other conservative believers) would be significantly more likely to adopt a rhetorical stance appropriate for a rhetorical space of interfaith dialogue, than they would be to change the aspects of their worldview that Crowley, and I, find problematic – their certainty, their view of truth, their epistemology,

etc. Based on years of experience with conservative Christians and Muslims, I believe that many of these conservative people of faith really do love “outsiders” and want to genuinely engage with them about faith. Although these feelings and desires can be mixed with other complex feelings, including fear and anger related to what they see as religiously motivated violence, attack on their beliefs and practices, and their loss of privilege in their societies – which, as described above, can make them reticent to participate in interfaith dialogue events. I believe there are four key ways that they can be convinced to join and appropriately participate in peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith difference. First, invitations to formally or informally engage or dialogue should emphasize that the rhetorical space the participants are being invited to is different from the rhetorical spaces of their own places of worship or religious education. It should also be emphasized that both kinds of rhetorical spaces are good and valid, but that they have different participants, purposes, and ways of interacting. Second, it should be emphasized that participants are expected to respect other persons, *not* (necessarily) other beliefs or ideas – that they are expected to accept the equality of the persons present, *not* (necessarily) the equality of the beliefs or ideas presented. Third, participants should be reminded that the other persons present may hold their (different, even contradictory) beliefs just as strongly. It might be appropriate to quite frankly say to participants, “They are (or may be) just as sure you are wrong as you are sure they are wrong.” Fourth, all participants should be encouraged to admit that they are human persons, and, thus, are finite and fallible. Based on this generally agreed upon understanding, participants should be encouraged to talk about their beliefs and experiences with appropriate humility. They should be reminded that saying, “I believe

this is true” (as opposed to “This is true”) does not “put down” or compromise the belief expressed, but is realistic about the nature of the believer.<sup>50</sup> While there is more to respectful engagement across faith and worldview difference (see, e.g. guidelines in Appendix B), I believe these four ways of understanding and explaining interfaith and inter-worldview dialogue have potential to attract and include strong conservative believers, and to encourage them to engage with (increased) epistemic and experiential humility and respect. These four understandings remove, for these believers, the “threat” they perceive in relativism and in some versions of “tolerance” or “pluralism.” They can enter the dialogue with their worldview intact and, by adopting this appropriate rhetorical stance, with the hope of explaining to others beliefs, practices, and experiences that mean so much to them. Finally, another advantage of this rhetorical stance approach is that the appropriate rhetorical stance described above can often be supported from different participants’ religious beliefs and worldviews, e.g. respect for others and equality of all human persons is “founded” on the idea of all people being created by God in many theistic worldviews (and for Christian and Jewish believers people being made in the image of God), and the idea of human persons being limited and “sinful” or “fallen” and thus unable to fully comprehend God or fully follow God’s ways is shared across monotheistic faiths.

In this section I have focused on ways that strong conservative believers could be (perceived to be) more epistemically and experientially humble and thus more respectful. In this section I have not discussed other potential participants in these interfaith or inter-worldview interactions because, typically, more liberal believers and people holding non-

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<sup>50</sup> While alluding to interpretation here, I do not explicitly mention it because, based on my earlier comment about interpretation, I believe it is best discussed later in the process of interfaith or intra-faith discussions.

religious worldviews are more epistemically and experientially humble due to the more relativist or constructivist nature of their worldviews, i.e. this is not a significant issue for them. However, these people may resist interaction with conservative believers due to the lack of respect or humility they perceive among conservative believers. These four guidelines may also encourage liberal believers or non-religious people to give dialogue with conservative believer a chance too.

### **Rhetorical Stances and Generosity**

Earlier I explained rhetorical stance as way of facing in order to distinguish it from worldview which I summarized as a way of seeing. The final aspect of rhetorical stance that I want to discuss includes and builds on the physical sense of the word “stance” and the phrase “way of facing.” In conversations, we all have noticed how body posture and facial expression can make us feel welcomed, appreciated, and listened to – or not. In the same way, I suggest that when people are engaging across faith and worldview difference, a generous stance and generous way of facing each other can make a significant difference in the quality of the interaction.

Being physically present with persons who identify with different faiths and worldviews, looking at their faces, and talking with and listening to them has an effect on the interaction. The physically present, embodied and vocalized reality of the others elicits a response / responsibility that allows no “fudging,” either intellectually or ethically – provided I choose to be genuinely present in that place and time, with these persons.<sup>51</sup> I cannot “get away with” slight or significant shaping, shading, or spin of the others’ words or ideas. This was experienced by Badru Kateregga, a Muslim, and David Shenk, a Christian, who are close friends, have taught comparative religions together, and

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<sup>51</sup> This resonates with Emmanuel Levinas’ seeing the face of the Other as the call to ethics.

have co-authored a book, *A Muslim and Christian in Dialogue*. The co-authored Preface is a great, concise description of their peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous interfaith dialogue, including their generous rhetorical stance toward each other. I appreciate the way they expressed this “responsibility that allows no ‘fudging.’” They wrote, “This book ... has been written under the glaring light of mutual presence. Every word we have written has been honed by knowledge that we are working together. Honesty, kindness, and sensitivity have therefore been absolutely necessary.” (2011, p. 12)

Seeing the beauty of Kateregga’s and Shenk’s interaction and the generosity of their stances, I have to wonder how the physical, embodied, vocalized presence of others affects those who have spoken in harsh, ugly ways. For example, I wonder about Evangelical Christian leader Franklin Graham. He leads Samaritan’s Purse, an international charity which has some projects and work in Muslim countries. He has surely met and worked with Muslims and has said he “has Muslim friends,” yet he has called Islam a “very evil and wicked religion” and has said, “True Islam cannot be practiced in this country [the USA]. You can’t beat your wife. You cannot murder your children if you think they’ve committed adultery ...” (Starr, 2010) I acknowledge that Graham did not refer to Muslims but to Islam and that he has said he “loves the people of Islam.” Graham would surely know the variety of ways Islam is expressed or lived out. Also, being a public figure, Franklin Graham surely knew that Muslims would be part of the audience hearing these public statements. Yet he did not adopt a generous rhetorical stance (or a genuine one), but made and stood by negative essentializing statements about Islam. I wonder why he made these statements. He is clearly bothered by the way some Muslims treat women, but surely he knows that there are many Muslims that are just as



bothered as he is by this – if not more bothered. But does he really believe that these expressions of Islam are somehow “true Islam”? Does he feel some need to distance himself from Islam or to identify with the negative views of Islam held by conservative Christian donors to his organization? Does he say these things in an attempt to show the superiority of Christianity?

I doubt Graham would have said these things in a face-to-face conversation with an Egyptian Muslim family. But he did say them publically, with Muslims in the potential (and actual) audience. This seems to illustrate that there can be at least three kinds of responses elicited by the embodied, vocalized presence of others: a rude, unaware, uncaring response; a polite, situated response; or a deeper response that allows (or begins to allow) the others to change the self. It seems that Kateregga’s and Shenk’s response was a deeper one that changed not just their immediate interactions, but produced in each of them a generosity toward the other. For Graham, it seems that, while he would probably not make these statements in a face-to-face conversation with Muslim, the interactions he has had with Muslims have not produced the same kind or depth of generosity toward the other. He insists on choosing and proclaiming a negative essentialized image of Islam.

The physically present, embodied and vocalized reality of the others calls not only for a “no fudging” response, but also for a response of generosity. My choice to respond generously gives the others the right, the power, and the space to create and form their images in my mind – and to the extent that I am able, I treat that space and those images as sacred, sacrosanct, and inviolable – allowing only them back into the sacred space to change the image as they change. In this way I, as best as I can, accept them as they are,

not as I would craft them. Then, I hope this elicits reciprocal generosity. I can do nothing but hope. If I do anything else, the others' generosity ceases to be generosity.

Of course this is impossible for so many reasons. There is no such sacred space in my mind. The others while trying to create their images in my mind are obliged to use the tools and raw materials available there – and this may cause great frustration or make it impossible to create their image. Also, the images the others and I form of ourselves, either directly or indirectly, are (even apart from the previous restriction) rough, incomplete, and inaccurate approximations due to flaws in our glasses and our mirrors.

But I would suggest that, even if it is unattainable, this is a good goal and just aiming for it will yield beneficial results. One of those results will be that by doing this with others I may be able to detect and adjust for some of the flaws in my glasses and mirrors. Another benefit is that by entering a dialogic rhetorical space of engagement across faith and worldview difference with this kind of a generous rhetorical stance, we set the stage for “moments of meeting.”

## CHAPTER VI

### RHETORICS OF ENGAGING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: CONTRIBUTIONS AND APPLICATIONS

I started this dissertation with descriptions of some events in the Charlie Hebdo incident as well as some reactions to it. I also added a few other more hopeful stories about people of faith. I wanted to highlight the huge difference in the ways people interact across faith and worldview difference, as well as the complexity of those interactions, in order to demonstrate the exigency of this study and to set the stage for the conversation of this dissertation.

My purpose in doing this research, as outlined in my three research questions, was to discover ways that the field of rhetoric could help us understand interactions across faith and worldview difference, and how it could help us facilitate engagement that is peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous. I also wanted to find ways these explorations could, in turn, inform the field of rhetoric. In the first chapter, I also explained my personal connection with this research and my desire to connect theory and ideas with practical application.

In this final chapter I will suggest three contributions my research offers the field of rhetoric studies. This is a direct answer to my third research question, but it also provides an opportunity to indirectly review some of the ways my research has answered the first two research questions. Following this I will offer an “Engagement Facilitation Toolbox.” This consists of a set of ten “tools” – practical ideas or activities – that can be

used in classroom or interpersonal contexts to encourage and facilitate peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference. These “tools” flow out of my (two-way) connecting of rhetoric theory and my constructs of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance with my teaching and interfaith experience. This Engagement Facilitation Toolbox could be the fourth contribution my research offers the field – most of the tools suggested could be adapted to encourage and facilitate engagement across other kinds of differences.

### **Contributions Offered to Rhetorical Studies**

#### **Support for a Broader Conception of Rhetoric**

My research supports the appropriateness and value of a broader and more complex conception of rhetoric. A broader conception of rhetoric explores interactions across difference that “matter” in all sorts of ways beyond the simple (instrumentally-focused) question of whether the (narrowly defined) audience was persuaded or whether there were “rhetorical outcomes” that “produce[d] action or change in the world” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 4). Interactions across faith and worldview difference can produce deadly or beautiful “change in the world.” However, these interactions, perhaps more than any other kind of interactions, *also* demonstrate that discourse “invites and facilitates the exchange of perspectives, constitutes persons and builds relationships and community, and, finally, collaborates in the face of conflicts” (Czubaroff, 2012, p. 60). The design of my Engaging Others Project and the students’ experience of the project illustrate this. I designed all aspects of the project to include dialogic, not monologic discourse – from the diverse group peer discussion of the faith and worldview autobiographies, to the discussions of various interfaith interactions, to the interfaith or inter-worldview exchanges outside the classroom. Students’ comments and work demonstrate the

personal, relational and ethical aspects of these exchanges. They changed the way they view and interact and relate across difference – many of them moving from an easy and safe tolerance to a willingness to engage more deeply about both differences and similarities – and to be challenged by these exchanges. Students expressed appreciation for gaining new perspectives and relating across difference. Conversely, my consideration and discussion of rhetorical stances which privilege (parts of) a person's or group's worldview or make essentializing moves explored the opposite (and complex) potential of discourse to limit the exchange of perspectives and cause stress in relationships. For example in my discussion of Abu-Nimer's (2001) study, I explained how participants resisted what they saw as his privileging of a relativistic-oriented worldview. These examples, and so many more throughout my dissertation demonstrate how much "is happening" in these interactions that would be missed if they were explored through the lens of traditional western rhetoric.

### **Ecotonal Rhetorical Space**

Related to the above contribution, I would suggest that my construct of rhetorical space offers a good way to understand the rhetorical ecotones of interactions across differences of many kinds – in addition to interactions across faith and worldview difference. While there are differences between people of different faiths interacting and people of, say, different political parties interacting, there are substantial similarities. I would suggest that in both situations people have interrelated sets of beliefs, feelings, and values that are strongly held, seem to be common sense, and drive their (inter)actions (e.g. witnessing and church attendance or political canvassing and voting). I would also suggest that interactions between them have a similarly broad potential, from nice to nasty. Thus, the same construct could be (adapted as necessary and) used in these other

rhetorical ecotones to explore the complex, changing, living, interrelated, networked relations and processes, *and* tensions that are present there.<sup>52</sup> While the five heuristic questions I offered in chapter four refer specifically to “faith and worldview difference,” they would work to explore interactions across other kinds of differences. I would also suggest that the importance of starting with the interactions and tracing the relations, processes, and influences that are there – and not imposing an “understanding” – remains the same.

Guidelines related to dialogic rhetorical space could also be used to facilitate more peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous interactions across other kinds of difference (beyond faith and worldview difference), e.g. political difference. However, in some contexts some aspects may not work the same. The person-centered, face-to-face meeting emphasis would continue to be core in engagement across political difference. Persons would engage with persons and tell stories as well as talk about ideas and beliefs – both those that are shared and those that are disagreed on. People would be free to change and not seen or portrayed as finalized. However, in some political contexts, especially legislative ones, the aspect of “*allosensus*” may not work. A law cannot both allow and forbid gay marriage (at the same time, in the same way, in the same place), nor can it both allow and forbid a specific kind of abortion. In these situations, consensus or dissensus must happen. But I would suggest that the other aspects of dialogic rhetorical space still have potential to change some of these ecotonal rhetorical spaces.

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<sup>52</sup> Note that it would be highly likely that political affiliation would be included in the ecotonal rhetorical space of interfaith interactions, and religious affiliation would, likewise, be included in the ecotonal rhetorical space of inter-political party interactions. It would be interesting (and complex) to compare various ecotonal rhetorical spaces of interfaith interactions and ecotonal rhetorical spaces of inter-political party interactions.

## **Peaceful, Respectful, Genuine, Generous Rhetorical Stance**

The third contribution my research offers the field of rhetoric studies is my construct of rhetorical stance. As I explained with rhetorical space above, the construct of rhetorical stance could be applied with minimal adaptation to interactions across other kinds of differences, e.g. political differences. As I emphasized in chapter five, rhetorical stance, as a “way of facing,” can be distinct from worldview as a “way of seeing.” A person’s rhetorical stance in a specific rhetorical space mediates or translates her worldview to her rhetorical performance, her actual interactions in that specific rhetorical space. Like rhetorical space, rhetorical stance can be used analytically to better understand interactions across difference, as well as to facilitate interactions that are peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous. The four recommendations for rhetorical stances related to each of these adjectives – and seem applicable to interaction across many kinds of serious or significant difference, including political difference:

- A peaceful rhetorical stance does not privilege (parts of) worldviews in an unwarranted way.
- A genuine rhetorical stance does not make negative or positive essentializing moves.
- A respectful rhetorical stance is epistemically and experientially humble.
- A generous rhetorical stance is responsive to the face and voice of the other.

Much interaction across political difference could be improved if those involved adopted these kind of stances.

## **Engagement Facilitation Toolbox**

As I explained above, this “Engagement Facilitation Toolbox” consists of a set of ten “tools” – practical ideas or activities – that can be used in classroom or interpersonal contexts to encourage and facilitate peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference. These “tools” flow out of my (two-way) connecting of rhetoric theory and my constructs of rhetorical space and rhetorical stance with my teaching and interfaith experience.

As I mentioned in chapters three and five, for some people, e.g. most of my university students, I encourage them to move from an “easy, safe” tolerance in which they “can’t say the other is wrong,” to a *genuine* rhetorical stance that includes finding differences and disagreeing. For others, e.g. some conservative believers, I encourage them to move from an exclusive “intolerance” in which they can seem to feel obliged to say the other is wrong, to *peaceful, respectful, generous* rhetorical stance. This is oversimplified, but I have found that I want to encourage people to move toward dialogue from different positions. These tools reflect this.

### **Engaging Others Project**

One of the main tools that I have used in my teaching and found useful in facilitating peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference is the Engaging Others Project which I have assigned as a semester project in several courses. The success of this project has come, I believe, because it has “forced” students to engage with others personally, face-to-face. Their encounters have been person-focused, not idea-focused – they have learned about another faith from believers of that faith, not solely from books and web pages. This is a key principle of



dialogic rhetorical space (mentioned in chapter four) which draws on Nikulin's (2010) four components of dialogue.

Because I have discussed the project and the results extensively in chapter three, I will only mention it briefly here. I found that the four parts of this project (the faith or worldview autobiography, the guidelines for engagement, the actual engagement across faith or worldview difference, and the reflective reporting on the experience of engagement) worked well together, with the earlier stages preparing students for the later stages. I found that each part contributed to helping students "become 'better', more aware, more thoughtful navigators of the religious / worldview / ideological diversity that is a reality in our communities and world"; and to facilitating students peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across faith and worldview difference. A couple of student comments give an idea of their learning. One student wrote, "I am taking away concepts and better knowledge about how to interact across faith and worldview difference, successfully." Another learned to "respect other people's views and listen to how they see it and not assume."

### **Power in the Classroom**

For the past few years, when teaching university courses, I always explicitly talk with the students about power relations in different rhetorical spaces, and the power I have (and can't not have) in the classroom. I explain to students that I talk explicitly about power because power that is down-played or hidden is still there and is more dangerous because, if the power is not seen or less visible, the need for those having power to be accountable and use the power responsibly is also less visible or obvious.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For an interesting discussion of visible vs. hidden power (or not wanting to be seen as having power) in Christian churches, including the (rhetorical) use and effect of different kinds of dress, platform furniture,

As I mentioned in chapter three, in order to keep myself accountable and aware of my use of power, and to check that I use it ethically and responsibly, I ask my students on anonymous mid-term and end-of-semester evaluations if I have been “respectful and fair to all students and to those whose work and ideas we read and discussed.”

I include attention to the (ab)use of power in both my descriptions of rhetorical space – in one of the heuristic questions, and rhetorical stance – in the recommendation against privileging one’s beliefs in an unwarranted way. As I mentioned in chapter two, traditional understandings of rhetoric privileged monologic, power-based persuasion, but did not recognize it as a significant part of the “rhetorical situation”, the broader conception of rhetoric endorsed by Czubaroff (2007, 2012) both recognizes it and encourages rhetors to consider the relational costs of power-based persuasion. I have become more aware of the (ab)use of power in faith communities and have included aspects of this in some of my descriptions in chapters four and five.

The practice of explicitly mentioning power has a couple advantages related to interacting across difference. It alerts students to pay attention to power. It models, I hope, appropriate use of power in situations where power differentials exist, as well as modeling and valuing respect in engagements across difference – the two are *not* mutually exclusive. I have also found that it encourages students to express their ideas and beliefs more freely, including ones that they would know differ from my ideas. As I report in chapter three, I was happy to see almost 100% positive feedback on the

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and microphones, including the small, almost invisible over-the-ear, skin-toned, wireless microphone used in most middle and upper class mega-churches and the much larger, obvious hand-held microphone used in many Pentecostal churches, see Crouch (2013). His discussion of the dangers of hidden power, prompted me to think more about the power of the teacher in the classroom, and the ways teachers hide their power or allow it to be visible, for example, in the ways that teachers allow or ask students to address them – by first name, or by a title and last name.

evaluation question mentioned above, and to read on one anonymous evaluation, “As an atheist going into this class, I figured I would feel uncomfortable, but I never did.”

### **Creative Nonfiction as an Invitation to Dialogue**

In addition to my noting above and in chapter three the value of a faith or worldview autobiography, I have found that creative nonfiction (CNF) is an excellent way for students to thoughtfully, respectfully, and genuinely engage across faith and worldview difference. While not the focus of this study, I gathered student data from two CNF courses I taught over the past couple years. I encouraged students to use CNF to explore their faith or spirituality through reflectively-told stories of significant happenings or experiences. Students’ group peer-review of their work and their sharing and discussion of excerpts of and reflections about their finished pieces with the whole class became excellent times of engagement across faith and worldview difference. First, the thoughtful, creative means of expression made the stories shared beautiful to listen to. Also, the stories were a great and respectful way to share about important or troubling or beautiful aspects of one’s faith, because they were personal – offerings for the other to consider. I was encouraged by the way that all students, including self-identified non-religious students, commented on the spiritual or religious experiences related in their peers’ stories – they could clearly sense and even “feel with” the other students in their experiences. I feel the success of CNF engagement across faith difference is due (as I explained above with the Engaging Others Project) to the strong personal and (literal) face-to-face interaction as students peer reviewed their work in groups of four, and sat in a circle with the whole class reading their CNF Reports (which include reflection about the writing process and excerpts of their pieces) to each other. Though monologic (like all writing), the CNF pieces were written from a respectful and genuine rhetorical stance

and were an “invitation to dialogue,” which was graciously accepted by the other students.

### **Pretending Game**

The pretending game is an adaptation of Peter Elbow’s (1973) Believing Game that encourages people to understand a radically different faith or worldview, often one that is negatively viewed, before possibly engaging with people holding that faith or worldview. The “game” involves learning about the beliefs and practices of the others, but also trying to get inside their minds, trying to understand how their beliefs and practices make sense in their worldview, trying to find out how their “system” hangs together, how their “logic” works. There is a key difference between the two games. While in the Believing Game you are exploring the others’ ideas and theories graciously (holding “doubt” in check) in order to find ideas that are useful or that offer a new or challenging perspective on previous thought that might be taken away; in the Pretending Game there is no expectation that one will find anything of value to be taken away. The goal of “pretending” to be the other, is to better understand their set of beliefs in order to challenge them or their ideas in a more informed way.

I developed this “game” with two situations in mind. The first situation involves understanding a fringe religious (or non-religious) group that is generally not accepted by a large majority of people who are aware of the group. Often the beliefs and practices of this group are seen by most people as offensive or dangerous. Thus, the typical reaction to this group is to exclude or expel them or segregate from them. The goal is to silence them and minimize their influence. A better understanding from inside of their world may result in knowing how to better engage challengingly with them or how to best minimize their influence. In chapter 2 I mentioned that Rose, one of my students, did this

for her semester project – playing the Pretending Game to understand a rude, obnoxious Christian preacher who visited her campus – and she came up with some good ideas of how students might best (not) react to this preacher. Another group of students did this with the Westboro Baptist Church, notorious for its hateful, homophobic demonstrations at military funerals.

The second situation where this might be useful involves individuals or a group having conservative, very exclusivist beliefs where basically they consider everyone else's beliefs wrong, and perhaps dangerous. By calling the activity the "Pretending" Game, and by explaining that the goal is *not* to find anything of value, but only to understand how *their* system makes sense for *them*, the teacher or leader can offer a kind of safety or distance to these exclusivist participants that might be enough to convince them to engage to some degree across faith or worldview difference. This interaction, especially with a generous interlocutor, could create potential for more accepting interaction in the conservative believer. I have not had any significant opportunity to use the Pretending Game in this second way, but I do feel it has potential. I would like to research this potential.

I believe this activity offers the potential for some kind of positive result out of very negative situations of (non)interaction across faith and worldview difference for a couple reasons. This activity seeks to follow the rhetorical stance recommendation against making negative or positive essentializing moves and the rhetorical stance recommendation to generously allow the others to create their image in our minds. Admittedly this is very hard. It is very easy (and justifiable) to simply write-off and ignore these extreme groups. However, I would suggest that some interaction might be

valuable in order to understand the thinking and systems so as to be alert to similar, if less extreme, examples. Also, there have been people who have left these extreme groups. Also, this activity, with its initial focus on non-personal learning about the other, may seem to go against the valuing of personal, face-to-face interaction across difference. I would suggest that in these situations where there is not just disagreement, but either serious negative evaluation and/or significant apprehension of the other, an initial (or, in some cases, any) face-to-face interaction could result in conflict and be counter-productive. Also, it is important for teachers to consider their students carefully when deciding if or how to play the pretending game, and to allow students the option of not playing. I sometimes tell students that I used this activity myself to understand Terry Jones, the Florida pastor who threatened to, and eventually did burn Qurans. I did this before writing him an email several years ago before his first planned burn. In my email, I tried to convince him from within my best guess of his worldview and beliefs. (I never heard back from him.)

### **Ideological or Faith Turing (Con)Tests**

This activity takes its name from Alan Turing, a famous code-breaking specialist in World War II, who developed a test which is used to determine if a computer can make people think it is a human person. Applied to ideological or faith or worldview interaction, these contests can encourage generous rhetorical stances and allow individuals to demonstrate their accurate and fair understanding of the other. This fun and engaging activity could be done in groups of various sizes and conducted formally or informally.

For the contests a small group of people present orally or in writing (if many people in the group know each other well) “their” beliefs or thinking about a topic. This

topic could be a religious doctrine or it could be a societal issue that has religious ramifications. The beliefs or thoughts they present may be their own or they may be their best shot at presenting the beliefs or thoughts of a person who holds a different faith, worldview, or ideology. The others who actually have these beliefs or thoughts, vote on whether the presenter is really one of them or not. Presenters who are best able to present convincingly beliefs or thoughts that are not their own win the contest.

This activity encourages generous rhetorical stances and recognizes those who are best able to adopt a generous rhetorical stance – studying and listening to the other, committed to understanding and honoring the others’ image of themselves, not the observer’s own image of them. Those who win in these contests are likely to also be good at engaging across difference. Their generous rhetorical stance not only helps them to understand the other well, but also people enjoy engaging with others who make the effort to understand them well, even if they disagree with them.

### **Rawlsian Veil of Ignorance Stories**

The late American philosopher John Rawls, recognized for his magnum opus, *A Theory of Justice*, suggested that a good way to determine the justice of a situation is to present the situation to participants who will or could be in that situation, but to do this in a way that does not reveal the roles of the participants. For example asking people about the justice of a zoning ordinance without them knowing if or how it will apply to their neighborhood. The idea is that being behind this “veil of ignorance” will remove self-interest from judgments about justice.

I have found that using stories informed by the Rawlsian Veil of Ignorance can help people see and feel the unjust situations of others and “get past” obstacles which are seen to be an integral part of their faith or worldview, and which can block them from

seeing this injustice. I have created these kind of stories or brief scenarios and discussed them with participants when teaching courses on the topic of understanding Muslims and Arabs. These stories and scenarios focus on the Palestinian – Israel conflict and seek to help participants get past the obstacles presented by Christian Zionism’s narratives and unquestioned support for the most hawkish elements of different Israeli governments over the years. Given the “rhetoric” of Christian Zionists, it would not be surprising if an analysis of the rhetorical stance of a Christian Zionist revealed aspects that are not conducive to peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous engagement across difference. In their interaction with others, Christian Zionists routinely privilege many beliefs about history and biblical interpretation that are not shared with their interlocutors. They also tend to make positive and negative essentializing moves about Israel and the Palestinians and Arabs (respectively) and don’t show much epistemic or experiential humility. They don’t have any kind of a generous stance toward others who do not agree with them. Given these significant obstacles, my aim with the Veil of Ignorance stories is to “get past” their dialogue-averse rhetorical stance. This might have potential to get them to change their own rhetorical stance.

One story I have created is loosely based on the experience of Palestinian Christian Elias Chacour who in 1948 at the age of seven was, with his family, forcibly (and deceptively) expelled from their ancestral home, fields, and orchards by Israeli soldiers. I rewrote two scenes of this story in which I switch the characters and locations so that the participants in the course are being forced from their own homes and farms. We discuss what kinds of political or military or “terrorist” activities would they consider taking part in or supporting and the ethicalness of these activities in these situations. I



also often assign or read in class excerpts of Chacour's autobiography (Chacour & Hazard, 2013). These activities challenge the narratives that many conservative American Christians have learned and accepted, personalizing and putting a face on the simplistically understood "bad guys," and offering more balanced narratives. Regarding "balance," I appreciate Chacour's holding in tension his insistence on exposing historical and current injustice and his love for his Jewish *Blood Brothers* (the title of his autobiography) who have also suffered. Chacour dedicates his book to his father, "Michael Moussa Chacour from Biram in Galilee, refugee in his own country and one who speaks the language of patience, forgiveness and love" and to "[his] brothers and sisters, the Jews who died in Dachau; and their brothers and sisters, the Palestinians who died in Tel-azzaatar, Sabra and Shatila refugee camps" (p. 5).

Another loosely Rawlsian scenario that I have used in courses and individual conversations to challenge many conservative Christians' unquestioned support for Israel complicates their understanding of God wanting them to "bless" Israel, based on God's promise to Israel that God will, "bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12:3). I ask them if God wants them to bless their children, which they agree with. I ask them if that means supporting their children unconditionally, and I give them a specific scenario, "If your 18 year-old son wanted to move in with his girlfriend, but didn't have enough money for the rent, and asked you to 'bless' and 'support' him by giving him money for rent, would you?" Conservative Christians consider premarital sex wrong and would not support their son in this. This often drives home the point that

“blessing” Israel should, at the least, not include unconditional support of their activities, especially those that are unjust toward others.<sup>54</sup>

### **Seeking to Discover How the Other Sees Me**

An important way to make interactions more peaceful, respectful, and generous, is to be willing to see one’s own group through the eyes of the other, and, when appropriate, use that perspective to make changes, specifically in the way one’s group interacts with the other, or more generally. When teaching courses at a non-sectarian university and adult education courses at a church I attended, I have given participants in the courses readings which are examples of Christians and Muslims doing this.

In the book *unChristian*, evangelical Christian authors, Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) report on well-designed sociological research that explores how people in their late teens to late twenties who are not Christians view Christians. They are brutally honest in reporting their findings in this popular level book. They write, “the title of this book, *unChristian*, reflects [non-Christians] most common reaction to the faith: they think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be” (p 15). They anticipate and answer from their research findings counter arguments from Christians, for example blaming the media for Christianity’s image problem.

“The Amman Message” (“The Amman Message,” 2007) which was approved by a large, diverse, and global group of Muslim scholars addresses a similar “image problem” – what these scholars and the majority of Muslims see as abuses in the name of Islam. This document seeks to “declare what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions

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<sup>54</sup> My mother credits this scenario as playing a significant role in her and my father changing their attitudes toward Israel and Palestine which were previously Christian Zionist.

represent it and what actions do not. ... It also exposes the illegitimate opinions of radical fundamentalists and terrorists from the point of view of true Islam.”

Reading and discussing texts like these in a classroom offers multiple benefits. Those in the primary audience for the document, e.g. Christians for Kinnaman and Lyons book, have a chance to consider changes in how they individually or in their faith groups will engage with others in the future. The authors of these documents recognize that those who are not Christians or Muslims are an important secondary audience. The Amman Message website explicitly states that the Message is “good news” for both Muslims and non-Muslims. This secondary audience can learn about the diversity of each faith, including those who give the faith a “bad name” and those who are trying to do something about it, as well as become aware of this advocacy going on within each faith. This more accurate understanding of the other faith can inform readers of the diversity within the faith they are reading about. This in turn then makes them less likely to make negative or positive essentializing moves about this other faith, which I warn against in chapter five. For the believer reading and considering this information about her own faith evidences a generous rhetorical stance – being willing not only for the others to create their image in her mind, but also being willing to consider their image of her faith community.

A quicker version of this that can be fun for participants is to look at and discuss images of bumper stickers, posters, protest signs, etc. that represent different positions and (more often) critiques of different positions typically taken by those holding different faiths or worldviews. Often these are political in nature, but also often have connections to issues that are informed by people’s faiths or worldviews. Obviously, the bumper

stickers have to be chosen carefully, with consideration of the participants to whom they will be shown. The key here (especially in mixed groups) is to encourage participants to be willing to consider what the other is critiquing about their own position and why – and not merely to laugh or smile at the ones that “get” the other side. Actually, I will tell students that I think being able to laugh at and recognize the cleverness of signs directed against one’s own ideas or beliefs is a good thing. Some of the ones I have used when teaching adult education at a church include, “WWJB – Who Would Jesus Bomb?”; “Don’t pray in my school, and I won’t think in your church.”; and “God hates figs (Mark 11:12-14).”

I also like some that critique the way interaction often happens (especially in the American culture wars) which can also prompt good discussion about engagement across difference. These include, “I disagree with you! But I’m pretty sure you’re not Hitler.”; “My opinions change with new information”; “ماكدونالدز Relax! It says ‘McDonalds’”; and “WHAT DO WE WANT?! Respectful discourse. WHEN DO WE WANT IT?! Now would be agreeable to me, but I am interested in your opinion.”

### **Listening and Learning Tour**

While living and teaching in a Middle Eastern country that has several different religions and religious groups represented in its population, I organized a listening and learning tour for people from a church in the USA I attended. I arranged for the group to meet a wide selection of religious leaders and teachers from the different religions and religious groups. These leaders spoke with the group about their beliefs, practices, histories, congregations, and interactions with others, as well as answering questions. The group also met with the interfaith dialogue student club I discussed in chapter four. I sensed that the pre-trip reading assignments helped the participants to have enough basic

understanding to be able to have more meaningful interactions in the face to face meetings with the various leaders and students. The feedback from the group as well as from those we visited was positive. I feel the success of the engagement across faith difference on this tour was due (as I explained above with the Engaging Others Project) to the strong personal and face-to-face interaction the participants had with the representatives of the various faith groups. This, as I mentioned in chapter four, is a key component of dialogic rhetorical space.

I purposely organized this trip differently than many trips organized by evangelical Christian churches in America. Most of these “short-term mission trips” are focused on how the American visitors will help the people of the place they are visiting, through evangelism, teaching, construction, medical work, community development, etc. I feel that while many of these trips are beneficial in appropriate ways (and many are not, creating dependency or other problems), I believe that, generally speaking, a listening and learning type trip engenders a more humble and dialogical rhetorical stance toward the religious others than the rhetorical stance engendered by the typical trips.

#### **10 F Human Persons and Epistemic Humility**

I developed this activity as a way to encourage people to consider their condition as human persons and to adopt a (more) epistemically and experientially humble attitude which seems to fit (better) with a more respectful stance toward others. Thus, this activity is very much aligned with my third main point about rhetorical stance. I have presented this activity in both non-sectarian university courses and in adult education courses in a Christian church. I have also discussed this informally with people on many occasions. Response to this activity has been positive, with one exception. This person, a young pastor who actively studies apologetics, at first really liked it, but later had

reservations about it, because, it seemed, he saw it as an attack against his understanding of faith as cognitive certainty leading to a commitment of the will, which it, indirectly, is. This highlights different understandings of faith which I discuss in chapter five.

This activity is built around ten adjectives which start with “f” and describe our limitations as human persons. These adjectives are listed on a handout (see in Table 3). We review the meanings of the adjectives, some of which are obvious, others require some explanation (marked with asterisks in Table 3). For example, when explaining “focused,” we talk about attention studies and watch some attention study videos which surprise viewers because of the “obvious” things they don’t see because they are focused on something else. One well-known example is the “dancing gorilla” video which asks the viewer to count how many times the players in white pass the basketball (Simons, 2010). Because of their focus on counting passes, most viewers miss the gorilla that very obviously walks right between the players. After the explanations, I ask participants to look at the continuums on the handout related to each adjective, and to rate themselves on each, the point being that all of these adjectives are true of all of us to some extent. I then encourage participants to think of and write about a specific time when one or more of these characteristics of our human condition negatively affected their “knowledge” of something. (This step can be difficult for students, and they sometimes end up writing very generally.) I sometimes explore how these limitations work with the ideas of confirmation bias and cognitive dissonance. I review with participants how this kind of understanding of ourselves can facilitate more peaceful, respectful, generous engagement across difference.

Table 3		
<i>10 F Human Persons</i>		
Where would you put yourself on the following continuums?		
Finite	I know nothing	I know everything
Fallible	I am mistaken about everything	I am mistaken about nothing
Feeble / Fragile	I can do nothing I want to (weak). I don't have it together at all.	I can do everything I want to (powerful). I have it all together.
Fearful	I am always motivated by fear	I am never motivated by fear
Fallen*	Nothing I do is "good"*	Everything I do is "good"
Formed*	Who I am, including how I see and understand, is totally formed by my cultural situatedness.	Who I am, including how I see and understand, is not affected at all by my cultural situatedness
Focused*	My "agenda" (what I want to do) always affects how I interpret things.	My "agenda" (what I want to do) never affects how I interpret things.
Frustrated	I always feel bothered that I can't / don't do enough "good" for myself and others / advocate enough for this "good".	I never feel bothered that I can't / don't do enough "good" for myself and others / advocate enough for this "good".
Forgetful	I always forget things.	I never forget anything.
Feeling	My thoughts, actions and perceptions are always affected by my feelings.	My thoughts, actions and perceptions are never affected by my feelings.

### **Rhetorical Stance of Faith, Hope, and Love**

I suggest that explicitly encouraging a "rhetorical stance of faith, hope, and love" could be an effective way to facilitate (more) peaceful, respectful, and generous interaction for Christians, but perhaps also for other religious or even non-religious people. This idea and activity could be presented and practiced formally or informally. When I have presented this idea or talked informally with people about it, it has been generally well received, but I have observed some of the opposition to aspects of this idea that I mention below.

This biblically based meditation resonates with my final recommendation for a dialogue-conducive rhetorical stance, which is to be generous, which is part of the outworking of love toward the other. This meditation emphasizes the higher (indeed,

highest) value of love vis-à-vis great rhetorical power. It also works to set up conditions (faith and hope) such that generosity – or love – is (more) possible to adopt as a believer’s rhetorical stance.

In 1 Corinthians 13 in the Christian Bible, the author, the Apostle Paul, is making a case for the supremacy of the practice of love in the life and ministry of Christian communities or churches. He is doing this in the context of a discussion about “gifts of the Spirit,” which, he states are given to believers by God to minister and serve “for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Some of these gifts are called “sign gifts,” such as “speaking in tongues” (the ability to speak other human or “heavenly” languages), prophecy, messages of knowledge and wisdom, healing, and other miraculous powers. These were seen as powerful evidence of God’s presence both to those inside and outside the church. We could say that these gifts gave the recipient great rhetorical power. Thus, these gifts were eagerly desired, and, based on what Paul is writing, it seems there was competition and pride related to who had the best “spiritual gift.” Paul, then, to make his argument about the supremacy of love, takes examples of these most coveted gifts and starkly presents them as worthless without love, e.g. “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1). He also presents the gifts as temporal and incomplete compared with the eternality and completeness of love, e.g. “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled... For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Paul concludes, “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Then he



continues with his discussion, emphasizing the edifying or building-up function of the gifts.

In the context of rhetorical spaces of interfaith engagement, I think these words can be an excellent challenge to those Christians (or others) who, like these early Christians, have a strongly believed message that they want to communicate to those who do not share their faith, and they want to find “all available means of persuasion” to do it.<sup>55</sup> The challenge here is *not* for the believer to throw away all of her rhetorically powerful arguments or stories (or spiritual gifts), but to remember that love is greater than them all – and to put this “inequality” (love > arguments) into practice in her interactions. Paul does not say spiritual gifts are bad or useless, he celebrates them and encourages the Corinthian believers to use them, but to realize that they can be misused, that is used without love. And Paul is very clear and practical about what love looks like:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

I think this could be applied very practically. I would suggest that after a formal interfaith event, that the various faith leaders distribute a survey (that all have agreed upon) to the audience not asking, as happens in debates, “Did we change your mind?”; but asking, “Did we interact in love?” This survey could be drawn from this passage and

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<sup>55</sup> While I have heard Christians speak of the use of spiritual gifts, e.g. healing, in interfaith contexts – where this passage would apply quite directly and literally, I will focus on how this passage might be considered by those involved in personal engagement without obvious supernatural intervention. I would also suggest that Christians (or others) involved in intra-faith interactions consider Paul’s argument as well.

from passages in the holy writings respected by the other participants. The survey could ask, “Were we patient? Were we kind? Were we boastful or proud? ...” It could also prompt participants to note the situations where the leaders did not live up to their goal of interacting in love. There might also be less formal ways that believers could similarly evaluate their more personal engagements across faith difference.

At this point, I anticipate some possible pushback from those who would advocate for a kind of “tough love,” arguing that “sometimes the most loving or good thing to do is painful and hurtful, and might not seem like love to the one loved in this way. I would point out that “tough love” is not used in a relationship of equals. It is used by parent toward a teen who continues to make poor life decisions, or by a person who is trying to help a spouse who is struggling with an addiction. In most relationships, people can sense another’s love, even if they don’t agree with her. For example, a person’s friend who suggests a non-traditional cure for cancer could be seen as loving, even if the person chooses a traditional treatment. “Tough love” witnessing or interacting seems to assume a deficiency or inability in the other. If that deficiency is not actually present, then that kind of interaction seems decidedly not respectful and not loving.

Of course, there are those believers who will insist that others are “blinded by sin – or Satan,” while they have “seen the light” and been “rescued from the kingdom of darkness,” so they need to continue to make others aware of their sin, regardless of how the others’ view the interaction. At this point, I would suggest to the person making this argument that they do an informal survey and start asking their believing friends how they came to believe.

Another way for Christians (or others) to reflect about and examine their own practices of engagement with others is to ask these questions based on the last verse of 1 Corinthians 13 (verse 13): “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

- Do I really have **faith** that my (most passionately held) beliefs, values, and practices are powerful, beautiful, and true? Do I have faith that these beliefs, values, and practices are attractive and compelling on their own, and can “advocate for themselves” in a fair exchange, without the need for me to find subtle or not so subtle ways to push them on others (i.e. to use coercive or hegemonic control or power)?
- Do I really have **hope** that people’s acceptance, adoption, and application of these beliefs, values, and practices will have a good and positive, if sometimes challenging effect on these people and their communities, and the world? Do I have hope that these changes will happen naturally or super-naturally without the need for my manipulation or engineering of them?
- Having, as much as possible, this faith and hope, can I then really **love** others in the practical ways Paul suggests? And can I do this in a manner and to an extent that I would be seen by them as loving?

Another way to ask these questions would be:

- Do I really have **faith** that God exists and is powerful, beautiful, and good? Do I have faith that God can advocate for God-self without my pushing?

- Do I really have **hope** that God can and will work in others' lives in ways that will be good, beautiful, and challenging for them, their communities, and the world – without my engineering?
- Having, as much as possible, this faith and hope in God, can I really **love** others in practical ways Paul suggests?

One word that comes to mind with each third bullet above is “relax.” If one is a sincere and genuine believer (and hoper) in God, she can realize that “saving the world” is God’s responsibility, not hers. As a sincere believer, she will likely believe that God works through believers. She will want to witness and work for God, and want to do her best at it, but having this kind of faith and hope, she will be freed to do this witness and work and in love.<sup>56</sup> I suggest that this kind of rhetorical stance of faith, hope, and love will facilitate interactions across faith difference that are (more) peaceful, respectful, genuine, and generous.

### **A Final (but not Finalized) Word and Invitations to Share Life**

As I bring this study to a close, I am pleased with what I have learned, accomplished, and offered in this research about the rhetorics of engagement across and about faith and worldview difference. However, I am faced with other, related questions and tasks that I would like to pursue. One area that I was not able to adequately address in this research is the facilitation of peaceful, respectful, genuine, generous interfaith engagement between conservative evangelical Christians and others. While I was able to describe the rhetorical space of their worship and educational gatherings, and aspects of their rhetorical stances, including recommendations to make their stances more dialogue-conducive, I was not able to try out any of these more fully developed recommendations

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<sup>56</sup> See discussion of witnessing in chapter five.

(as I was able to do with students, who generally came to my courses with more of an “easy, safe tolerance” attitude toward diversity). I would like to try and then evaluate these recommendations, including investigating whether these recommendations would reduce their resistance to engagement across difference. I also think it would be useful to (further) study: differences between older and younger conservative believers in their attitudes toward (including resistance to) engagement across faith and worldview difference; and how conservative Christians use terms and concepts like “biblical worldview,” “truth,” “tolerance,” and “postmodern” in their interactions about (and sometimes across) faith and worldview difference. One of my main goals in this future research is to find ways to lessen resistance among conservative believers to engagement across difference.

To close I want to share two stories from my students in a course I taught more recently.<sup>57</sup> Both of these stories demonstrate not just good engagement across faith and worldview difference, but also invitations from those the students visited to share life or to connect across faith and worldview difference.

Several students in the class went to a local mosque for their Engaging Others Project. After observing evening prayers the students, the imam, and several Muslims who attended the mosque, including two college students met with my students to talk about Islam and answer questions. In response to a question about facing opposition, one Muslim told a story about a friend that happened after 9-11. He was at a stoplight and a pedestrian at the corner looked at him and screamed, “I’ve got Osama bin Laden! Call the cops!” The Muslims laughed at the story, but my students were uncomfortable and

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<sup>57</sup> I did obtain an IRB protocol for collection of student data and informed consent from the students for this course, but have not yet fully analyzed the student data collected.

quiet. One of the younger Muslims noticed their discomfort and said to the group, “They don’t know if they should be laughing or not.” At this my students joined in with the laughter, recognizing that treating this incident lightly was this group of Muslims way of dealing with it – and recognizing and accepting their invitation to join them in their overcoming of this with laughter.

Three other students visited a Saturday Shabbat service at a small Jewish synagogue. They interacted with those attending the service and observed the service of reading prayers, reading from the Torah, singing songs, discussing the weekly scripture, and a final prayer. The last part of the service was called “Simcha,” which is Hebrew for happiness or joy. For this part, the Rabbi brought out shot glasses and bottles of wine, liquor, and grape juice and each person took a glass. The members each shared simchas or good things that were happening in their lives. The Rabbi offered my students a drink and invited them to each share a simcha which they did. When they all finished, the whole group drank together to share their joy. My students appreciated being invited to share life with this small group of Jewish believers in this way.

I appreciate these two stories because in both people of faith were inviting others of a different faith or worldview to share life with them in some small, but significant way. The students in each case wrote about the interactions, about what they observed, about the things they learned, about similarities and differences between their own faith or worldview and the others’ faith, about how they were welcomed to the services, about the interest of their hosts, about their willingness to talk and answer questions, about the things they appreciated, and about the things they did not like or agree with. They demonstrated that their projects were successful and their interactions were peaceful,

respectful, genuine, and generous. But I think these small ways of sharing life, of connecting across faith and worldview difference were something a little extra. I think the students will remember them – these incidents were the ones chosen by several of these students to share with the rest of the class. I think they were the kind of sharing life that could begin a friendship. While I don't know that friendships will develop from these interactions, I do believe that these students are prepared to engage across difference – and accept and offer invitations to share life across difference – and develop friendships across difference in the future.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTER TO STUDENTS

Dear Students,

**One of the main purposes of a course syllabus** (and the first days of class) is to help you to adjust your expectations – to get an idea of what the course (and teacher) will be like and to decide if you want to continue in the course. Please read this letter, the rest of the syllabus, and the other course documents with this in mind. Pay attention to the kind and amount of reading, writing, thinking, and interacting you will be expected to do. If you decide to drop, that is fine – that is why there is a drop/add period – another section or teacher may be a better fit for you. If you decide to continue, you do that with a good idea of what to expect – and an implied agreement that you accept the course as represented in the syllabus and other documents.

**I want to give you an idea of what we will be exploring together.** We live in a postsecular world. Or at least many would claim this – both those who like and don't like this development. Sociologists, and others, used to subscribe to the theory of secularization – roughly, that as modernity continued to grow, religion's influence in society would continue to decrease. While this seemed to be the case for quite a while, over the past 20-30 years many sociologists, and others, have come to believe that the evidence does not support the theory – or that the theory needs a major reworking. Rather than a demise of religion, it seems there has, *in various different ways*, been a resurgence of religion, “faith”, and “spirituality” that has accompanied continued growth of modernity.

We also live in a diverse world. Another aspect of life in a global, modern world is that, over the past few generations, an increasing majority of the world's population, in their daily lives, are much more confronted with the diversity (cultural, religious/faith/worldview, socio-economic, political, etc.) of their communities and the world – and, are increasingly required to interact with others across difference.

And we live in a rhetorical world. We, as humans, have developed a host of ways to engage with others, communicate our ideas, and seek to persuade – ways that can be violent or peaceful, disdainful or respectful, unethical or ethical.

Arguably, interactions across and about religious / faith / worldview difference<sup>58</sup> have been and are some of the most complex and toughest to pull off peacefully. Violent engagement (both verbal and physical) across faith difference is ubiquitous in our communities and our world today. One reason for this is that the beliefs, values, attitudes, approaches, and practices that *are* our faith / worldview are often very deeply imbedded in us – they are a core part of our identity and the communities we value most – not to mention the ways that they are intertwined with culture, history, and power.

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<sup>58</sup> Of course, interactions across difference are rarely, if ever, across one dimension of difference.

Another reason that can cause (and some would say inevitably causes) conflict is that many of us want to or feel obliged to “witness” / “evangelize” / “reach out” – to engage with others about our faith or worldview – with a desire to see others understand and join us. But there are also beautiful and peaceful examples of interfaith engagement and even service.

**So how does all this come together?** How do people navigate this diversity? How should we? This is what we will be exploring together this semester. This will involve:

- reading and studying some basic ideas (theory) from the fields of rhetoric, sociology, and religious studies;
- reflecting, exploring, and analyzing our own faith or worldview – as well as the “contexts” (present and past) that have shaped us;
- reading (or listening to / watching) and analyzing various examples (“texts”) of interfaith and inter-worldview interaction – AND exploring and considering the various “contexts” of these interactions;
- synthesizing our findings and thoughts and creating our own “guidelines” for engaging across and about faith / worldview difference; and
- actually engaging with others across faith or worldview difference, and then reflecting and reporting on this engagement.

**One of my overall goals** in this course is that is that by exploring these ideas and examples, critically engaging these texts, and interacting with others (in and outside our class), we can become “better”, more aware, more thoughtful navigators of the religious / worldview / ideological diversity that is a reality in our communities and world. I hope that we will be not be satisfied with mere tolerance of “others”, but that we will engage diversity – pursuing peaceful, respectful, genuine dialogue with people of other faiths / worldviews / ideologies – and then encourage others to do the same.

As I said, I am excited about this course and I hope you will actively join in our exploration together. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Peace,

John MacLean

## APPENDIX B

### INTERFAITH DIALOGUE – RATIONALE, GUIDELINES, ACTIVITIES

#### **Our Rationale – Why are we doing this?**

1. Like cross-cultural dialogue, interfaith dialogue makes us richer. Understanding the faith of individuals and groups who are different from us helps us understand them better. This enables better communication and deeper community at the local – or even global level. Also, as we gain this perspective, we can understand ourselves better.
2. Interfaith dialogue can help us prevent or stop negative attitudes and actions against people of other faiths. Much prejudice and discrimination is based on wrong or twisted information. The best way to correct (or better yet, prevent) this is to provide a way to accurately learn about the other faith AND to talk with people of that faith.
3. Good interfaith dialogue necessarily develops our understanding of our own faith as well as our ability to analyze and think critically about it. These skills can go a long way in helping us, as people of faith, recognize opportunists who try to use our faith in pursuit of unwholesome ends (e.g. for political or violent purposes).
4. Some expressions of some faiths include beliefs or practices that many people find distasteful or even immoral (e.g. role of women, refusing blood transfusions). Interfaith dialogue provides an excellent way to provide to others – or to make sure we have – a full and accurate understanding of this issue. After we have listened to each other, there may be an opportunity to respectfully challenge each other regarding these beliefs or practices.
5. Through interfaith dialogue, we can identify areas of common interest between faiths. Through this we can discover ways that people of different faiths can work together for the common good (e.g. fighting poverty, supporting women's rights, working against human trafficking).
6. Religions or faiths are basically philosophies or worldviews – attempts to make sense of “life, the universe and everything” and, then, provide guidance on how to live. As we understand others' faith and practice, AND as we answer others' questions about ours (along with the thinking / research that requires), we may find ourselves tweaking or even changing our own faith or practice in ways that we find more valid or satisfying.

#### **Our Understanding of / Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue<sup>59</sup> – How do we do this?**

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<sup>59</sup> We realize that there are other understandings of and guidelines for interfaith dialogue (e.g. <https://sites.google.com/site/interfaithdialoguebasicseu/interfaith-dialogue/interfaith-dialogue-guidelines> ), with which we would agree in many, but not all ways.

In order to avoid misunderstanding and confusion, and to guide our approach, attitude and conduct, we want to clearly state our understanding of the nature of interfaith dialogue and the guidelines that proceed from our understanding.

1. We believe that all humans are equal and equally deserve basic human rights. (See, e.g., The Universal Declaration of Human Rights)
2. We agree that one of the most basic rights people have is the “freedom of thought, conscience and religion [which] includes [the] freedom to change [one’s] religion or belief”.<sup>60</sup>
3. We commit ourselves to an attitude and a practice of mutual respect in our dialogue.
4. We welcome all who want to dialogue – including those who identify with an established faith tradition or religion, those who do not, but still value faith and spirituality, as well as those who are skeptical about a supernatural reality. Some may prefer the word “worldview” to faith. All of us can dialogue together because, although we have different answers, we all ask the same basic questions.
5. In our search for truth (natural or supernatural), some believe that it is possible to approach truth. However, because we are all finite and fallible beings, we can never be sure we have apprehended truth.<sup>61</sup> We say, “I believe this is true.” Only an omniscient being can say, “This is true.”
6. We believe that interfaith dialogue should explore both similarities and differences between faiths or worldviews. While looking for common ground is a good way to start dialogue, seeking *only* common ground will result in a shallow understanding of the other faith.<sup>62</sup> However, we also agree that care should be taken when talking about contradictory beliefs or practices. A dialogue can become a debate and a debate can become antagonistic.<sup>63</sup> The focus in dialogue is a presentation of one’s own (not the other’s) beliefs and practices and the reasons for them.

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We also realize that some would object to interfaith dialogue because they see it as an acknowledgement of the equal truth of the faiths – which they see as logically impossible and/or as violating their belief in the rightness or exclusivity of their own faith. In our understanding of interfaith dialogue, “equality” is NOT an equality of the faiths, but an equality of the faithful; not an equality of the beliefs, but an equality of the believers. (See guideline 1.)

<sup>60</sup> Source: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18  
(<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>)

However, we also agree that adopting a different faith is a decision that one should make carefully and thoughtfully, in the absence of any coercion or pressure. In addition to being a person’s *own* decision, some would also want to acknowledge the role of God in a person’s decision to change her/his faith.

The possibility of interfaith dialogue when some involved do not accept this right / freedom is a legitimate topic of discussion, but is beyond the scope of this document.

<sup>61</sup> While there might be disagreement and discussion among dialogue participants regarding theories of truth and epistemology, the important aspect here is taking seriously our limitations as human “knowers”.

<sup>62</sup> It is only natural that sincere believers in different faiths will make conflicting exclusive truth-claims. (e.g. a Christian’s claim that “Jesus was crucified.” vs. a Muslim’s claim that “Jesus was not crucified.”) While study and better understanding may eliminate some perceived differences and elucidate some underlying similarities, significant differences will remain. Studying and understanding these differences shows respect to the believers of both faiths, ignoring genuine differences or pretending they do not conflict does not.

<sup>63</sup> We do recognize that debates may have value in interfaith relations – if they are carefully and appropriately planned, guided and controlled.

7. We come to the dialogue to understand the other and their faith or worldview. We agree that we should not come if we are *only* interested in talking about our own faith. We should have a sincere desire to learn about the others' faith – to really understand why they believe and practice as they do. Thus, when questioning others, we should listen and allow them to interpret their own faith. We should not try to “nail them” with our questions.<sup>64</sup>
8. We also come to the dialogue to clearly present the beauty, reason and content of our own faith and faith journey. We want to explain how our faith works out in our lives, how it informs our views and actions in all areas (e.g. relationships, environment, science, the justice system, ethics, politics, child raising, family life, art, etc.).
9. There may be times when someone wishes to correct a dialogue partner. This may involve a research related issue (e.g. factual mistake, questionable source, misquote, etc.), or a (perceived) lack of appropriate respect (e.g. an inappropriate comment). We agree that these situations (esp. the latter) should be handled carefully, and always with the assumption that the error or offence was inadvertent. It may not be possible or advisable to resolve the issue during the dialogue, in which case a joint statement should be issued after those involved have further discussed the issue. In the case of significant inappropriate behavior by a speaker or participant, a leader or participant *from the same faith* should talk with the person and deal with the situation.
10. We agree that dialogue partners should, as much as possible, be equals – similar age, experience in the faith, education, and position in their faith group.
11. We welcome exploration and consideration of feasible ways in which we can serve our communities together.

#### **Our Activities – What are we doing? (tentative ideas)**

1. Public, formal interfaith dialogue events with speakers representing different faiths. Each speaker addresses a clearly specified topic from the perspective of his/her faith tradition, followed by responses to and dialogue with each other, as well as questions from the audience.
2. Guided, informal small group conversations. Short, “priming” talks by representatives of different faiths followed by small group dialogue. Each mixed-faith, small group is moderated by a trained student leader.
3. Interfaith exploration opportunities. Each faith group involved in the club is encouraged to assemble informative materials (print, AV, online) that are made available for those interested in exploring and learning.
4. Moderated online discussions.
5. Visits to each others' places of prayer/worship. Observation of a prayer/worship service. Preceded and/or followed by opportunity for explanation and Q and A.
6. Invitations to holy day celebrations or observances. Observe or participate as appropriate. Preceded and/or followed by opportunity for explanation and Q and A.

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<sup>64</sup> However, it is appropriate to respectfully ask questions to explore areas of the other faith that don't make sense to us or to clarify differences between the faiths.

7. Guidance and training on principles and practice of good interfaith dialogue. Preparation for student leaders as well as more general training. Making instructive materials available.
8. Viewing and discussing films on themes related to interfaith dialogue. These could include training in dialogue type videos, documentary / non-fiction / issue films, and appropriately themed popular movies – including international films.
9. Service. Community service together, followed by discussion of how participants' faith guides and motivates their service.